

The background of the cover is a painting. It depicts a woman in a long yellow dress with a red sash, standing on a rocky shore and looking out at a turbulent blue-green sea. In the distance, a suspension bridge with stone towers spans the water. A small boat is visible on the water near the bridge. The sky is dark and cloudy.

Captain Jack Dulin

RETURN of the GUNBOAT

by
Chuck Clegg

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of the
Gunboat
1895**

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Special thanks to Earl Yost for his design and creation of this book's cover.

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My Definitions for Words and Events in the Story

bells: a way for a pilot to communicate with the engine room Engineer hears the sound of different bells over engine room noise. Each of the different bells has a different meaning.

bitters: name given to liquid sold as stomach remedy to avoid whiskey tax in the 1800s

bow: front of a boat

bucket boards: wood boards attached to the metal rotating structure on the drive assembly of a paddle wheeler

bulkhead: term for wall in marine service

dish boat: typically a non-power boat with a cabin built on it, might be used as a floating store, Medicine doctor, Photographer shop, etc. After supplies were used up, or the dish boat ended up far downriver, the owner paid to have a passing steamer push the dish boat back upriver.

dip: the depth the bucket board on the paddle wheel went into the water

draft: the water displaced by the hull of a boat as it passes through the water

doctor feed pump: steam-powered pump used to feed water to the boilers

damper: device used to allow more or less air into the firebox to help control fuel burning

gangplank: boards used as a walkway on or off steamboat

heat jiggers: heat rash caused by excessive sweating in heavy clothing

keel: main structural support of a steamboat The beam runs from bow to stern, forming the backbone of the vessel.

kevel: a sturdy bit or bollard for securing heavy cables on a ship

Knights of the Golden Circle: a secret society that was believed to have wanted to annex parts of Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean to be part of the United States and used as slave states

lazy bench: a comfortable bench often found in the pilothouse

main steam valve: valve that allows steam from boiler to enter steam engine to power piston

mud drum: a drum located beneath boilers to collect mud and heavy materials from boiler water

oakum: twisted fiber treated with tar, used to pack or caulk seams

pitman arm: device that transfers power from the steam engine to the paddle-wheel crank

pilothouse telegraph: device the pilot and engineer use to communicate commands to and from the engine room

river snags: trees or roots that have fallen into the river that create hazards for river travelers

SS Sultana: the name of a side-wheeler steamship that exploded in April 1865, killing an estimated 1,800 returning Union soldiers. It's believed that on the ship that was built to hold no more than 376 passengers, 2400 souls were on board at the time of the accident.

safety: valve on the boiler that automatically opens to allow steam to escape before exceeding the safe design of the boiler

sawyer: the up and down motion of an object that appears and disappears in the water due to its buoyancy being close to that of water

stern: the back of the boat

speaking tube: metal tube used to allow the voice of the pilot to communicate to the engineer in the engine room

sounding: a way of measuring the depth of water with a long pole or a weighted rope

wharf: a pier where steamboats tie up, usually in a city

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Acknowledgements

Perhaps in the world of literature there are those who have achieved exceptional skills in the telling of a story who can say, “I have done this all on my own.” When a writer can boast of such skills I consider him to be an author in every sense of the word.

I think, for many writers, their ability often is influenced by their own skills and those of the people who have influenced their lives. The shared experiences and encouragement of others play a role in the words they form into sentences that create their literary works. Those people are also ones I consider to be true authors.

For me, putting my words to paper is the way my imagination brings my characters to life and puts them into places I want them to be. Long before I ever knew anything about writing, a teacher named Thelma Morgan encouraged me to write down my stories and thoughts, and during my time as one of her students, I wrote a story in the form of a poem about then President John Kennedy and his family. I’ve long forgotten those words I wrote in that classroom, but I do remember that before Kennedy’s death, Mrs. Morgan decided to send a copy of my poem to the President. A short time later a letter arrived at my home from the White House. Inside was a form letter thanking me for the story. Also included were two pictures—one was of the President, and the other was of him with his wife and children. I realize the letter wasn’t personally from the President, but it was the first official recognition of something I had written. I remember little about those years in the early sixties, but I

remember Mrs. Morgan and her encouragement, and the pictures of the President. With the passing of time both were lost along the way.

After that, skills taught in my English classes varied greatly. Many teachers instructed us students to read chapters seven through ten and added the warning there'd be a test on Friday. For some, reading the chapters and understanding the information were enough to learn its lesson. For me the words on the pages seemed to have little meaning. For me to understand and learn, the teachers had to talk about what was in the chapter and explain the information. When they did, I understood the lesson, but I struggled to understand the words and the meanings when I read them on my own. Too often, the words made no sense at all as I moved along the pages. My grades were high enough that I passed through the education system, but unfortunately, the words I remember from most of my teachers are related to the times when I was having difficulty reading. One teacher went so far as to say, "It's all right; you're just a little dumb when it comes to reading." At least she was good enough to lean down and not let the other kids hear her say I was dumb.

I resigned myself to believing she may be right and thought: *After all, when I get out of school, who'll ever stop me on the street and ask me to define a verb or a preposition or read a paragraph to him?* During my senior year in high school, my feelings toward my reading problems eventually changed after being assigned to Helen Pyles's English class. Initially, I knew I was in trouble because her reputation was well known as a

no-nonsense teacher of Senior English, and I knew there was no way I could fool her into letting me just pass through as others had. I knew I was sunk.

But, before long, I began to understand Ms. Pyles was a teacher who knew how to teach the English language. She was strict and demanding of her students, but her method was tempered by understanding and a mastery of teaching the English language that made it enjoyable. I continued to have difficulty with the words on paper, but Ms. Pyles gave me the incentive to develop my capabilities to a point where I began to see beyond the words. She taught me that words have meaning and that when you put them together they can tell a story. She made Hemmingway and Melville people I wished I knew. She taught me that if I could imagine it, I could create it with words. Mrs. Morgan taught me about using words, and Ms. Pyles taught me there are endless possibilities those words could create.

After graduation I went off to the Air Force to see the world outside the Ohio Valley. During my time stationed in the southwest I learned, from a sergeant whose name I can no longer remember, something I still use today when I read or write. One day I saw the sergeant moving his lips as he read a paper, and I made a comment on the way he was reading. He told me that for him, the words on paper didn't always make sense or seem to be in the correct order. He went on to explain how he'd learned that if he read out loud to himself, the words began to fall into place. After some time he'd

learned to read silently to himself and still understand the written words on the paper. His insight on how to overcome the challenge of reading words is something I still use today.

For many years after that I didn't write or read much for pleasure, but for my job I needed to read and understand information about equipment I may be working on. I used the skill taught to me by that old sergeant from years ago to work my way through the manuals. My difficulty with reading and writing didn't interfere much with my daily life, because much like I'd done in high school, I understood and adapted to my limitation. Another problem persisted over the years, though, that I found even more difficult to overcome. A problem I couldn't ignore. My imagination. It never stopped working.

All that changed a few years ago when a friend Bruce Crawford, sports writer for the *Wetzel Chronicle*, offered me an opportunity to write a story for the sports section. His offer kick-started my imagination—and this time it had a purpose. I know that first story I wrote needed a lot of help to be good enough to publish but when Bruce ran the story, I saw—for the first time—a story written by me, on a subject of my choosing—published in a newspaper. It was the first of many articles he gave me the opportunity to write. After a while, *Wetzel Chronicle* editor Amy Witschey allowed me to write on a variety of topics for the paper. At home in the evenings I wrote

my stories, read them over several times, and made corrections to the words my eyes told me were written on the paper, but I knew that in too many cases the words weren't really there in the order I wanted them to be. The computer's spell checker was often my friend, but sometimes it didn't even know what my misspelled words were supposed to be, so it couldn't help me. My struggle continued—when I read my own stories, I read what I believed I had written, but in fact the words on the paper were different. My mind remembered my thoughts correctly, but my fingers typed something else. Each time my eyes read the words, they told me the words were correct. It was a battle to match what I wrote on the paper with what I pulled from my mind and meant to be written there.

In my spare time I read my stories and tried to correct all the mistakes, but each time I read them, I found even more. Finally, I asked a few people I worked with to read my stories in their spare time and to give me their honest opinions—and their opinions and insight into my spelling and grammar gradually helped to make a difference in my writing. With their help the story told in print is what my imagination said inside my head. Judy Baker, Sharon Burke, and Carolyn Andenora took time out of their lives to help guide my stories. Their understanding and words of encouragement have made a difference in my writings, and I thank them for their input.

After writing a draft for this book, I asked two other friends to read it along with a couple people I mentioned above. Joan Estep and Timmy Jackson agreed to read it and gave me their opinions on

my story. I learned when I asked people to read my stories and give me their opinions, I often sensed hesitation. I assured them I wanted an honest opinion, even if their opinion wasn't favorable. Their ideas and thoughts were invaluable to the book's final outcome. Joan's help with editing, spelling, and grammar gave me the final confidence to say that I had written a book, something I have wanted to do for many years. This thought persisted: *If I can publish this story, I will fulfill a lifelong dream of being a Storyteller.* One other person I met along the way has been a big help in getting the words from my computer screen onto the pages of my first book. Debbie Ice is someone I met by chance. I learned from our first conversation that she's also a self-described storyteller and has published her first book: *vicissitudes: the ups and downs and changes experienced in a lifetime.* Debbie's help in formatting this book was a godsend.

I must also thank my friend Earl Yost for his help and skills in creating this book's cover. Earl's gift as an artist comes from a lifetime of skills. When I asked him to create the cover he asked if he could read my book so he'd be able to picture in his mind's eye what was within the pages. With the skills of a gifted artist, Earl transformed the words of this book into what became its wonderful cover.

I hope you'll understand that any ability I have for being a storyteller by putting my words to paper has been influenced by many people over the course of my life. As I said in the beginning, skilled authors can write books and stories on their own with no help.

I consider myself lucky to have friends who've helped to guide my storytelling skills. Their words and guidance have turned that small boy whose writing was first encouraged and given recognition in Mrs. Morgan's class over fifty years ago, into the person I am today. I've begun to use words as a brush to paint the pages with stories unleashed from my imagination, while using skills Mrs. Pyles taught me in that long-ago English class. I will never be a writer, but I hope I can be called a Storyteller.

There is one more person I need to acknowledge in the journey, my wife of forty-two years, Mary E. My wife takes the time to read me the words I've written down on paper. With her help we make those words say what's in my head. She's always encouraged and supported me in expressing what's in my imagination. I know there must have been times she wondered what was floating around inside my head, and truth is, at times I do too. I now know that all I have or will ever be is because of her love and understanding, but that's a story for another day.

Chuck Clegg

PROLOGUE

The Ohio Valley has played an important part in the growth of America. The Ohio River flows westward for nearly a thousand miles before joining the Mississippi River on its way to the Gulf of Mexico. When the Ohio River's water volume joins the Mississippi River at Cairo, Illinois—well, that's the main reason we associate the word "mighty" with the Mississippi.

The Ohio River gets its name from Native Americans who inhabited the lands along the river before recorded time. The native word means "Good River." Early settlers along the river were often trappers in pursuit of furs for Europe. Fur traders moved their trappings through French forts built along the river and on to markets. In 1763 the French and British fought a war over territorial ownership.

The river's flow toward the west made it an early travel way for explorers heading for the unsettled lands beyond the setting sun. Over time, flatboats and canoes were replaced by steamboats. The city of Wheeling, West Virginia, played a major role in the development of the early steamboats. Some even call it the home of the big river steamboat.

Wheeling is a city that grew because of its industry and location on the river. Near the mid-1850s the city completed its famous suspension bridge which is still used today. The building of the bridge across the river gave Wheeling an additional edge in the area's growth. The bridge, along with the National Road that was built

through Wheeling in 1818, assured its position for a growing country's way west.

What you are about to read is a fictional account of an adventure on the Ohio River in 1895. Any events or similarity to people living or dead are purely coincidental. These are characters of my own imagination. The times and events around which I blend my characters into the story are, for the most part, real historical events, but I may have romanticized them at times to help with the story's flow. The time in history from the Civil War until 1900 was alive with adventure and the growth of a nation, including the formation of the state of West Virginia, a state which didn't exist until a war nearly tore the entire country apart. The city of Wheeling's roles in the growth of the state as its first capital, and also as a major industry center, are very important parts of the valley's history. Even though the foresight of Wheeling's early citizens made the town a major player in the country's development, much of Wheeling's place in the history of our country almost seems to have been forgotten and lost with the passing of time.

Samuel Clemens's beloved novels that told of life on the Mississippi secured that river's place in our imaginations, but the Ohio River also supplied much of the water for Clemens's stories. Unfortunately, too many stories of life on the Ohio remain untold. If only they'd been told and retold throughout the valley's existence—passed along through word of mouth until they eventually found homes within the covers of history books and on the pages of

novels written by authors whose imaginations used them to create stories to be forever shared with their readers.

When I look upon the passing river I can begin to imagine the history of our nation that passed down its dark green waters. I begin to imagine the lives of men and women who, with their hands, hard work, and determination, struggled to build the cities and towns along its banks. I hope my story of adventure and history will fill your mind with images of what life on the Mighty Ohio River was like over a century ago.

Chapter 1

Brother-in-law's Story

Jack! You in there?" Billy Meyers called as he stood looking down on the old houseboat rocking gently in the river's slow-moving current. He held his hand in front of his eyes to shield them from the near-blinding reflection of the early morning sun. At this time of year, the morning sun's angle was just right to send the water's reflection high onto the river's bank into anyone's eyes who came calling on the watery home. "Jack, you old fart, get up and come out here."

Jack Dulin was known to all who lived along the Ohio River for miles up and down the watery highway. He'd even once worked as far up north as the city of Pittsburgh. Jack knew the heat of the steel furnaces that made iron to build the country after the war. His scarred hands and arms showed where hot metal had splashed and taken its toll on his tanned skin. He also worked among the hills that guide the river's flow to the south. In dark mines dug deep into the earth, men sweat in the darkness to harvest the black coal in order to fuel factories and warm the homes above. Jack ventured for a time into that darkness to toil inside the earth, but the dark place had no windows for him to see the blue sky above. Jack was a man who loved the land and sky as if they were his own. The darkness of the

mine and the smoke-filled factories gave him no pleasure when they hid from him those things he loved.

But most of all, Jack loved the river. He grew up in the small town of Parlorton. He was the son of William Dulin, a prominent businessman in the community, and Mary, a respected teacher. Mary Dulin taught at the Academy of Fine Young Women, a school where the social elite sent their daughters to be schooled in the proper ways of a lady's life. They were taught the normal schoolwork of reading and ciphering, but they were also taught how to dress properly for a summer cotillion dance and to walk with their heads held high like proper young ladies. Jack remembers, even back then, how those who had old money looked down on him even though his family was of good means. Jack's family, like many others after the war, turned skills and education into good positions in the community. Still they were considered "new money"—not the kind with money who almost would have meant "royalty" if they still lived in the old country.

Jack never felt comfortable in the world of his parents. To their disappointment, he went off to war when the call came. But the young, handsome, restless man never returned. In his place returned a man with deep scars created in war when he saw man's savagery to his fellow man. The glory of right for the cause was lost in the terrible suffering he'd seen. The memories of burnt earth and loss created nightmares that haunted his restless sleep. Some say he was nearly killed in the water battle of gunboats near Vicksburg. Others

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say he was killed in the bloody fight at Buffington's Island. They say the Ohio River ran red with men's blood that day in the summer of '63. Gray or blue made no nevermind. All who died that summer day shed blood that turned the dark green waters of the Ohio to red. Jack came home a man who worked hard to forget those hidden memories of war. He hoped the hot fires of steel furnaces or the inky black darkness of the earth could erase those constant nightmarish images. He even tried to find answers in the taste of bad whiskey—lots of it—but after a while, he realized that only a return to the quiet life on the river could help to ease his pain.

After the war, his parents moved to the new state's capital, the city of Wheeling. The great bridge that crossed the river brought many new businesses to the city. Jack's father had a good head for business management and became one of the leaders of the newly emerging financial center. His mother soon became head mistress at a prominent school for young ladies where the importance of a proper education included teaching proper social skills in conjunction with an education of the world.

Jack only saw his parents a few times after they relocated to Wheeling. He didn't want his rough and scarred appearance to offend his parents' new friends. Truth was, they never worried about what others thought of their son. They loved him and hoped he would someday find answers in his search for happiness, wherever his path took him.

In the winter of '89, Jack heard some say the influenza came over with immigrants from Russia and spread like wildfire throughout the population. People died by the thousands, especially older folks and young children. Jack heard about the dying but, living on the river, paid little mind to it. He had no way of knowing his parents were among those who lost their lives until about a year later when he returned to the city looking for a part needed for his boat's boiler. Neighbors told Jack of his parents' passing that cold December, and one neighbor lady handed Jack a picture of his parents that he remembered had sat on their living-room mantel. She told Jack his mother was so sick on her deathbed that she knew her time was near and had asked her to give the picture to Jack, should he ever come around. The neighbor lady reckoned Mary's last thoughts were of Jack and how much she loved her lost son. It's said Jack found his parents' resting place and sat talking to them, all afternoon, in the shade of a great oak tree. He placed the picture of his parents on the stone that held the names of his parents and told them stories of the war and his love for them. He'd never told them he loved them until that day. That was in the summer of '91.

"Jack Dulin! Is you in there?" Billy called out again. The only sound from the old houseboat was the lapping of the water on the sides of the unpainted wooden barge that had been turned into a floating home. When the boat's constant gentle movement in the water took tight the heavy hemp ropes that secured it to the two big water maples on the bank, the ropes gave a strange sound like being

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squeezed. After being stretched, they'd recoil from the strain and gently sink down onto the sandy bank and into the river water. In a few moments the dance of the river's movement would start, again, the rope's endless movement.

The blackened smokestack leaned to the side as it came through the roof and showed a whisper of gray smoke lazily drifting out of the dark pipe into the warm still morning air. Blackened creosote from smoldering wood fires cooled and ran down the sides of the stack, giving the appearance that it was melting from the heat. Two winters ago the buildup of creosote caught fire one snowy night, and Jack had almost lost his floating home.

Billy knew Jack had to be in there and figured he was probably still sleeping off the contents of the empty bitters bottle that was rolling back and forth on the constantly moving deck. Bitters was sold for stomach remedy, but in truth it was a way to get past the whiskey tax that otherwise had to be paid. Jack needed the treatment a couple times a week to keep his stomach in check, but most mornings after he felt worse, so most likely it was the cure that caused the problem in the first place.

The night's wet dew on the tar-paper roof slowly began to evaporate and float, like steam, into the new day's air as the rising sun warmed the dark roof to give it the appearance it was hotter than it actually was. Scattered and settled across the roof was the night's collection of mayflies that awaited what would be short-lived lives in the daylight world. River swallows, with feathers so black they

looked almost blue in the morning sun, made short work of those lace-winged mayflies that ventured into the air looking for a moment of love to continue the small creatures' cycle of life. From out of nowhere, the dark birds swooped in and picked off the easy meal that was served up in the early morning light. They made no sound on the wind as they swooped and soared, feeding until no more mayflies flew up for the serving.

Billy looked around on the ground until he found some small stones that he picked up and tossed underhanded on the roof of the boat. The stones bounced off the dew-covered roof, and many fell in the water on the far side of the boat. The small stones gave cause to send dozens of mayflies scattering to the wind and the birds into a feeding frenzy. No sounds were heard as mayflies died by the dozens. A few of the lace-winged creatures landed on the water in an attempt to make their escape, but from below, the yellow lips of carp fish appeared from the dark green water and quickly swallowed the hapless flyers. The mayflies' short lives seemed doomed for quick death along the river's edge. Nature's cycle of life played out millions of times and hardly anyone ever seemed to notice. Still, with all the deaths, the creatures of the water endured, and at least some survived to continue the cycle of life as though the good Lord made this part of the plan for life along the river.

Billy finally saw the boat move slightly, and a small ripple of water spread from the sides where the water met the wood planks. Someone was beginning to move inside, and the water's silent ripples

gave him away. The sound of someone coughing escaped from the open window on the far end of the boat.

“Jack, get up! We got work to do!”

Mumbling sounds came from the boat—not words, just some mumbling noises—until, from unseen inside, a deep, gruff voice came booming out into the morning, “Who the hell’s out there? Can’t a respectable man get a good night’s sleep on the river anymore?” The long faded yellow cloth that was once a curtain was abruptly pulled open and, in the window, the head of a man appeared in the daylight. His eyes were still unacquainted with the bright light of day and needed rubbing to help clear the night blindness. He rubbed his eyes and squinted up at the man standing on the bank above the houseboat. Still unable to recognize the man, he bellowed out again, “Who’s up there?”

The man called down, “It’s me, Jack. Billy Meyers.”

“Billy? Billy Meyers? ’Z’at you? What’re you standin’ up there for? Come on down. You know I can’t see good far away.”

Billy had to watch his step as he made his way down the smooth well-worn clay path on that part of the riverbank. It was a good place to tie up and not worry about the high bank of sand that might give way in high water. The clay bank was on the opposite side of the river from the quick bend and on the protected side with the slower moving waters. When high waters came, the far river bend saw fast water and lots of stuff coming down the river washing away the soft sand and trees that grew there. Where Jack had tied his boat

wasn't in the direct path of the fast waters in the spring. This knowledge of the river gave the boat a safe place to ride out big water. The clay bank down to Jack's boat was hard and unlikely to slip in wet weather, but it did make for a slippery path when it rained or heavy dew settled on it.

"Ah, shit!" Billy yelled when his feet slipped. His backside came down hard on the slippery yellow clay, and he slid down the bank to the edge of the water.

Jack, who was still looking out the window, watched as Billy came to an abrupt stop next to the water's edge. "Billy, you better be careful; that yeller clay might be slippery this mornin'." He laughed as Billy got up and said a few words not often heard by proper folk.

"I hope you're happy. I come all the way out here t' give you some good news."

Jack, still looking out the window, asked, "You want some coffee to go with your wet ass?"

By now, Billy'd stood up and was making his way across the old wooden board used to get onto the boat that doubled as a home, brushing his backside off as he went. "Real coffee or some o' that stuff you tried to pass off as coffee last year?"

Jack had come up with a scheme to buy old feed corn from the local farmers, roast it with sassafras root, mix in a little molasses, and let it dry in the sun. Then he ground it into a coffee-looking concoction and tried to sell it to the local restaurants as fine French coffee he'd acquired while working on a cargo packet boat out of

Wheeling. It tasted and smelled like burnt sweet corn, and no one wanted to buy the horrid mixture. He did manage to sell some to the fancy ladies at the fall festival. They were so snooty they couldn't pass up a chance to have some fancy French coffee. Afterward, they were so pompous that there was no way they were going to admit it tasted like burnt corn and not the fine coffee they paid for.

But Jack seemed to have a way to snooker the fine people of the town on occasion. Thankfully most have forgotten that old Indian remedy for heat chiggers. Back in the summer of '71, the heat was as bad as anyone could remember along the Ohio River. Dog days set in and the river slowed to such a pace you could swear it wasn't moving. Proper people wore too many clothes, especially lady folks, and in the heat they suffered and sweat under their fine clothes. They wouldn't admit it, but they did. Under all those fine frilly clothes were hot sweaty women praying for cooler weather. Those folks in town who weren't so proper in their convictions, stripped down to just their necessities to remain Christian and comfortable. A few even went down to the warm river and went swimming in the river water. Some said the widow Gamble was so hot one night she went skinny dipping in the small creek south of town. Two boys said they saw her in the moonlight swimming in the dark pool of water near the old mill path. She denied it, but the next day a fine petticoat with the same initials as hers embroidered in the hem was found hanging in a spicewood bush.

Jack concocted what he called “an old Indian remedy for heat” and sold it at the back doors of the fine people of the community during that hot spell. The results were worse than the heat could ever be. But that’s a story for another time.

Billy was still trying to clean some of the old yellow mud from his backside as Jack came out the door with two small crock mugs that doubled as coffee cups. Hair messed up from sleeping, unshaven for a week, and his eyes still not wide open to the day, Jack was a sight in his baggy pants. “Here,” as he reached the cup toward Billy in a gesturing offer, “and it’s real coffee. I don’t have any more o’ that fine French stuff.” He laughed as he handed it to Billy. “What brings you out this early in the mornin’?” he asked, leaning back in the old willow-branch chair while taking a slow drink of coffee.

Billy lowered the cup of coffee from his lips and shook his head as he said, “Ain’t much better than the French crap, Jack.”

“Ya think so? I guess I might’ve reached the bottom o’ the coffee bag and a little o’ that stuff may still be in there. Ain’t had time to do a lot o’ shoppin’ last couple o’ months. Been upriver, workin’.” Jack took his hand and wiped the mayflies from the small table into the water and set down his coffee cup. As soon as the flies hit the water the yellow lips of the river carp began sucking them in for breakfast.

Jack grinned as he watched the fish for a moment. “Them fish lips remind me of a gal down in Cincinnati workin’ at the dock warehouse office.” Jack leaned back in his chair and looked over at

Billy. "Always said you could lick 'er lips and stick 'er to a glass window. Bigger lips I never seen on a woman anywhere."

The two men sat there for a minute and watched as the carp fish finished off the small flies buzzing around on top of the slow-moving water. The old bitters bottle rolled back and forth across the deck making a funny sound as it hit a metal bolt near the sideboard. "I'm gonna have to clean this boat up some day. What's up Billy?"

"Jack, the steamer 'Miss Boston' run afoul of a snag above Clarrington Bend last night. Ripped the whole side out of 'er and she's sittin' high on 'er starboard side and lower on 'er port. She's a restin' on the sandbar that drops off into deeper water just below 'er port side. River current shifts, or the sand begins to wash away, and she's gonna roll over an' be deep into the river channel. The current'll wash 'er over, and even a man who knows how won't be able to make a profit before the river claims 'er."

Jack was wide awake now. He smiled large at Billy, with his teeth gleaming in the early morning sunshine. Treasure to be had if he could get to her before the river, or even worse, a salvage boat sent by the insurance company out of Wheeling arrives.

Jack rubbed his face and ran his hands along the sides of his head to smooth his dark hair. It was time for business, and a feller had to look like a businessman when discussing big business. "How'd you come across this information so quick, Billy?"

"You remember my sister's husband?" Billy asked Jack with a bit of a frown on his face.

“Yeah, the one who had his one ear chewed off in that fight?” Then he laughed as he sat back in the chair and picked up his coffee cup. He took a slow drink. The laughter was about the fight. It was with a lady of the evening, and she said he shortchanged her for services. She took his ear as payment in full for services rendered. They say she keeps it in a jar by her bed to make sure anyone else who would think about shortchanging her would have second thoughts. Billy’s brother-in-law still says he lost it in a bar fight, but everyone knows the truth.

Before Billy began, he looked around as if to make sure no one was listening. Easy done, being they were the only ones on the boat or the river at that point. Leaning forward toward Jack, he started in a low tone, “Well, that same feller was workin’ as a fire stoker on this boat. He went aboard the Boston in Wheeling when the regular stoker took to bein’ sick with fever. He was workin’ the dock, loadin’ cargo, and he helped to carry the guy off the boat. That’s when they hired ’im on—to replace the sick guy.”

“What was they loadin’ the Boston with?” Jack leaned over and was now talking quietly too.

“Cases o’ green bottles filled with whiskey an’ boxes o’ cigars. Cases and cases of ’em. Shippin’ ’em downriver to Cincinnati to sell. O’ course she was loaded with lots o’ other stuff, but the whiskey and cigars’re easy salvage and easy sold downriver for a quick profit.”

Jack sat back in the chair and tilted it onto the back legs as he began to ponder the information Billy had just told him. He twisted

his mouth to the right and then to the left. Twitched his nose a couple times and then took two fingers and rubbed both sides of his week-old studded chin whiskers. Now, Jack had salvaged many wrecked boats on this old river, and they all came with problems. But this seemed too good to be true—that is, if what Billy had told him was correct.

Coming down with a thud when the two front chair legs hit the wooden deck, he quickly leaned forward toward Billy, “All right. Your one-eared brother-in-law, and a wrecked steamer, and us, how does this all fit together? Seems to me we’re missin’ your brother-in-law, and what about the crew of the boat still bein’ on board to stop us from takin’ such a valuable cargo?”

“No, that’s the beauty of this. The crew abandoned the steamer just south o’ that sharp bend in the river near Moundsville. One o’ the men was goin’ on about the sick man and that he had the scarlet fever. He told the other crewmen he’d seen it before, and he wasn’t gonna take a chance catchin’ it from the sick crewman. After all, that feller with the fever had been breathin’ the same air on this boat and touchin’ the same stuff as they were. No sir, he got to talkin’ about the fever and death and most of the men jumped overboard in the big bend and swam to shore near the mouth o’ the creek. Brother-in-law and that feller who started all the trouble stayed aboard.” Billy sat back in his chair and paused a moment before going on.

Jack looked at Billy with more interest now, “Well, what’s the rest of it?”

Billy continued, "A little later, Brother-in-law caught that guy closin' the boiler dampers an' ventin' steam. By then it was too late t' get the boiler pressure back up t' supply the engines. Without steam in that part o' the river, the captain couldn't keep 'er from founderin' in the current and so he run 'er into a snag near shore that ripped a hole in 'er bottom. The captain was a man o' the bottle and had lost a boat before. He got scared he'd get the blame and went ashore after the groundin', hopin' t' see the steamer roll over into deep water. If she was lost in the river he could tell that the boiler exploded and his crew abandoned the boat. The deckhand finished closin' the damper doors and told Brother-in-law they'd better get off the boat before she rolled. The crewman acted real nervous as him and Brother-in-law made their way to shore. Once they got to the bank he told Brother-in-law he had to go, and he quickly disappeared in the tall horseweeds along the river."

With a serious look on his face, Jack asked, "Okay, how'd your brother-in-law get downriver t' tell you 'bout the wreck? And, iffin' the crewman had the scarlet fever, I'm not sure I wanna go pokin' my nose around some death boat neither. Green bottles o' whiskey and cigars're good sellin' salvage, but not worth gettin' the fever for."

Billy began again, "With the steamer up on the far side and out of the main channel, she went dark with the night and Brother-in-law still on the far side o' the river. He knew somethin' wasn't right with that boat bein' run aground, figured she'd been sculled by someone and they'd come after the cargo. It give 'im time to come up with a

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plan t' come downriver, find us, and go back t' salvage 'er cargo before them pirates showed up. After all, she lay grounded just ten miles upriver from Parlorton. He reckoned he could make his way downriver and find me, and I could meet up with you, and with your salvage boat, we could get back to him by sunset tomorrow. But, then he saw a slow-movin' packet boat comin' downriver runnin' by coal, oil basket hangin' over her bow, as she was workin' her way down the far side. She was stayin' near the bank for guidance in the dark. Her crew never saw the wreck in the darkness. He swam t' the slow-movin' barge as she was a pushin' deep with the heavy cargo in tow and was able to climb aboard without bein' seen by the crew. Come mornin', he saw the lights o' town and slipped unseen over the side o' the barge and swam for shore. He come a knockin' at my door still wet with water near first light to tell me the story. He knew of you and that your salvage boat could get there before the insurance people's boat would show up, make a quick profit, and head home." Billy sat back looking pretty smug with himself.

"What about the fever?" Jack asked.

"Weren't no fever a'tall. The guy told my brother-in-law as they carried 'im up to the hospital wagon he'd eaten rhubarb pie, and he saw the leaves were baked into the pie too. The captain earlier that day had given him a piece of sugary sweet pie. He weren't sure why the captain was so generous to him but gave none of the other crew any. Somethin' in the pie made 'im sick pretty quick-like, and caused 'im t' break out in a bad red rash like the color o' the scarlet fever.

My brother-in-law remembers back to when he was a little kid bein' told by his mam to never eat the leaves of rhubarb plants. They could make you sick in your stomach. Somethin' in the leaves that's not good for a man."

Jack sat back in his chair and began to ponder the information as he watched Billy trying to drink that awful cup of coffee. "Anything else I should know before I say we're goin' after it? After all, you're talkin' 'bout mutiny, piracy, and now a wrecked steamer. Somebody comin' after that cargo, and you and your brother-in-law want me to steam right into that, if I'm understandin' you right?"

Billy poured the rest of the coffee into the river as he turned toward Jack, "Yeah, the steamer's sittin' on a soft sandbar, and the current comin' 'round her stern's slowly washin' away the river bottom she's a restin' on. Maybe gone over into deep water already or she could sit there for a couple days before rollin' over. Hard to tell, accordin' to Brother-in-law, but she's gonna roll. He could see the current kicked up on her port side and the sand bein' carried away. The river's current and soft sandy bottom are workin' against us gettin' that salvage."

Jack had seen this before, during the war, on the Mississippi. A riverboat with twin stacks was taken over by confederate boys who didn't have much river experience. His outfit was encamped on the near side of the river. The confederates planned to come up on the camp and, all of sudden-like, open up with cannons and rifle fire. They had six smooth-barrel artillery pieces they mounted on the

second deck, all on one side. Not being riverboat men, they didn't realize that putting all that weight of cannons and soldiers on one side of the boat would cause the unbalanced weight to pull her to the heavy starboard side.

They made their run in the early morning on the camp while Jack and the other men were still sleeping. All of a sudden the hidden gray soldiers who were inside the steamer's cabins came over to the starboard side and made ready for battle. Without warning, the confederates opened fire on the camp. In the heat of battle the confederate officer in charge didn't notice the boat heading toward the sandbar. The inexperienced pilot put the boat hard over, but her shallow draft and heavy starboard load couldn't stop the grounding of the big boat on the sandbar. Her full head of steam drove her hard onto the sand, and a tree snag lodged there ripped deep into her underbelly. Below decks the sound of wooden planks busting was followed by fast rushing water as she quickly filled up with the Mississippi. She sat leaning in the current unable to move. By that time, Jack and his fellow soldiers mustered the men and set about shooting at the easy targets on the foundering boat. The confederate soldiers had nowhere to go, and the unprotected wooden side did little to slow the lead bullets from piercing the walls.

After a few hours, the federals brought up a couple field artillery pieces and fired on the stranded boat. On the far side, confederate soldiers jumped into the water and tried to swim the heavy current of the big river, but many of them were lost. Somewhere near sunset,

the river's current washed the sand from under the port side of the boat. The sand on the side toward the bank was still intact because the big steamer's sunken hull blocked the swift current from her starboard side. Heavy with water below her deck and eroding sand below her port side, the big boat's fate was sealed. The once grand steamer's bow section began to twist out into the fast-moving current, and with her hull full of water, she began to roll toward her port side. Her starboard side rose up, and the cannons crashed into the sides of the second floor, busting boards and smashing glass windows. The federal soldiers could see the faces of some of the gray soldiers as they grabbed the handrail to try and hold on as the boat rolled. They didn't look scared as much as they looked surprised. All in one motion the great river pulled the dead steamer over into deep water. It happened so fast that Jack and the others were also surprised. The last they saw of the boat, she was floating away—bottom-up with air and water gushing from the gaping hole in her bottom. When the air was gone she sank below the green, fast-moving waters. Few confederate soldiers survived that battle with the river. It was a terrible thing to see the river claim so many lives aboard the crippled steamer that day.

Jack knew the river's currents could move the soft sand beneath the boat just like Billy's brother-in-law had said. If that happened, the boat and salvage would be gone just like that steamer was many long years ago. "Where is your one-eared brother-in-law now?" Jack

hollered aloud as he jumped up from the chair, startling dozens of mayflies sitting on the side rail of the boat.

Billy was a bit startled at his sudden movement as well. "Jack, he's waitin' on the Mary E. Figured you'd want him t' have the fire in the boiler by the time we got there."

Jack quickly looked back as he was entering the door of his cabin, "Pretty damn sure o' your plan, weren't ya?"

Billy just smiled as he kicked the rolling whiskey bottle overboard and heard the splash of water.

The Mary E was Jack's packet steamer he used for salvaging on the river. It was named after his mother. He kept her tied to the north end of the cargo wharf in Parlorton. On occasion, he did free work for the manager of the wharf. In the hot years, when the river ran low in the late summer, Jack ferried cargo from the big boats that held position in the main channel, afraid to venture close to shore. His shallow draft packet boat could move alongside the big boats, offload their cargo, and move it to the wharf where the water was shallow. Occasionally, a crate of whiskey would accidently fall overboard during the off-loading operation, and Jack would take a swim and retrieve the lost cargo next to the docks. He claimed right of salvage. He always gave the wharf master his share of the salvage which they drank as they sat nearby and told stories of the river. In return, the manager let Jack keep his boat tied to the north side so she wouldn't interfere with the big steamers that came in. Those heavy cargo steamers always wanted to approach from the downriver

side into the wharf. Keeping the bow of the boat headed into the current while keeping the engines turning the big paddles gave them more control when easing into the wharf. If they made a misjudgment, they slacked off the power and let the current pull them back into the river channel. Once they repositioned in the current, they made a second approach to the wharf. Most experienced pilots only needed one run at the wharf.

Jack quickly dressed and even combed his hair before coming out of the cabin. Once out on the deck, he took his captain's hat in hand, and looking at his reflection in the small glass window, positioned the hat just so on his head. "All right you river man, let's go make some money."

Jack and Billy climbed the yellow clay bank and headed off toward town, while talking as they went, of the plan and money to be made.

Chapter 2

Off to Find Miss Boston

The town of Parlorton was just waking up as the two men made their way along the river path toward the town's cargo wharf.

"I hope your one-eared brother-in-law has kept his mouth closed about the wreck," Jack said as he pushed a willow branch out of his way along the narrow path.

"Don't worry. He realizes this is his big chance t' make some money so he don't have t' work the rest of the season."

Billy's brother-in-law and his wife lived just up the river a piece, in Wheeling. During season, he worked boats up and down the river, when the water was good, but late summer in the dry years, the big boats often had trouble running the river's narrow channels in low water because hidden sandbars and tree snags often damaged the underside of the boats. The big paddle wheels would sometimes pull up sunken trees hidden in shallow water and the snags could get caught in the bucket boards of the paddles where boards in the drive paddles were quickly busted, and the steamers couldn't maneuver well with an out-of-balance water wheel pushing the boats. Their small rudders couldn't compensate for the imbalance when maneuvering in the late summer channels that had narrowed in low-water conditions.

Come wintertime the upper river often began to freeze in the shallower bends, and as temperatures dropped, the ice slowly grew to spread out into the main channel until it slowed down or completely stopped all river travel. Only the bravest or most desperate of captains took their boats out into a river making ice, and too many who hit heavy ice were left stranded. Salvage crews came from shore and removed as much from the wreckages as was possible before the thaw and spring rains raised the river and swept away the stripped hulls of the abandoned boats.

Brother-in-law knew a big salvage was easy money when you had an opportunity. He figured the boat's cargo could be salvaged, transported downriver to a big town like Cincinnati, and sold at a good profit. Maybe two or three hundred dollars would be his share of the prize. That kind of money was what he'd make for a whole season of stoking hot steam boilers below deck or moving cargo on and off wharfs. He wasn't going to spoil his chance for financial independence.

He'd also heard of a man in Muskingum City who could fix him an ear like the ones on those dummies in that traveling wax museum that came through town two summers ago. They say for ten dollars he can carve out of a fine-grained piece of wood, a nose, or an ear for a person. Paint it all life-like and attach a string to it. With a small string tied around his head, and if he were to wear a hat to cover the string, people would think he was a man with two ears and a hat. That idea appealed to Brother-in-law.

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Jack could see the smoke coming from the boiler rising out of the single stack. Not heavy smoke yet, mostly wood burning in the firebox heating the water. He knew she was ready to make way when the small poppet valve released a quick jet of steam to control the boiler's pressure. Jack would have Billy tie the valve down when he made his way from the dock upriver. He knew it was risky, but he'd done it many times, just had to keep an eye on the pressure gauge. With that valve tied down he could probably get nearly 180 pounds of pressure to feed the steam engine. Many boats' boilers had blown when there was no relief valve operating, but Billy was one of the best engineers on the river, and Jack trusted him completely. Besides, if he messed up, he'd be the first to go in an explosion.

Brother-in-law hadn't laid on the bed of coal yet to bring up the heat to red-hot. Wood burns faster and hot; and coal burns more slowly and makes lots of black smoke. He'd fired up Jack's boiler before and knew his secret to a quick fire when ready. No sense making black smoke early in the morning and causing people to start wondering what was going on.

Most folks knew Jack's trade, and when he fired up the boiler before a decent breakfast time, that meant he was headed off to a wreck. Brother-in-law was smart enough to know Jack would want to get away from the docks, burning wood, and not trigger suspicion to those who watched such things.

When working in the steel mills, Jack saw that when you forced air into a firebox it would burn hot and fast. He knew a blacksmith

fellow who helped him make a set of bellows and fashion an air jet into the front of his boiler's firebox. When he was of a mind to, Jack would have Billy pump the bellows, and the boiler's pressure would rise quickly when needed. Brother-in-law had laid on the wood and made ready the bellows. He knew time was wasting, and he was eager to go.

Jack and Billy slowed their pace as they came out of the undergrowth that hid the path along the river. With some relief, Jack said, "That Brother-in-law may not be so dumb after all. He got the Mary E fired up on wood to keep down the heavy smoke. That's good." They stopped for a moment and looked around to see if any unusual activity was stirring in the main part of town. Train wasn't due in till 9 o'clock, and Frank Pendleton's boat was still tied off and her stacks cold, so Jack knew no one in town had yet learned of the wreck. Insurance people came in by train, and that son-of-a-bitch Frank always talked them into letting him go salvage their wrecks. He told them he'd get a crew and could move faster if they didn't go along, then he'd go and see what could be taken before the insurance companies' heavy salvage boats arrived from Pittsburgh or Wheeling. Trouble was, Frank's first love was to himself, which meant stealing as much as he could before anyone else got there. He had no morals about him. He took their money to get to the wreck, stole all he could take, moved the cargo downriver a little ways, and hid it. Then he'd go back and wait for the big salvagers to come. Tells them and

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the insurance company some no-good like Jack probably got there first and stripped the unfortunate wreck.

Jack prided himself on not taking cash money from the insurance companies. After all, insurance companies just took people's hard-earned money and hoped they'd never have to file a claim and get it back. Why, he even heard that one time a packet boat out of Pittsburgh ran aground during a flood, and the boat and all her crew were lost in the brown muddy waters. The heartless insurance people wouldn't pay up—not for the lost crew, the lost cargo, and not a red cent for the lost captain, owner of the boat. Said it was an act of God. It's a poor businessman who steals from a hard-working river man's family and says God didn't want him to pay.

Jack salvaged a wreck by his rules of the river and then sold its contents at a profit downriver. He knew he was more honorable than that low-down Frank and the greedy insurance companies. He wasn't lying to the insurance company, and he wasn't stealing. He was salvaging. Big difference to Jack. To Billy and Brother-in-law, it made no difference, the wreck meant good money to make and the only investments were sweat, time, and of course Jack's boat. Morals had nothing to do with a salvage job. 'Course they didn't hold with pirating loot from boats that were deliberately wrecked. That was straight out thievin'!

Brother-in-law rummaged around the cabin for a few minutes waiting for Billy and Jack to arrive. After a minute he found the coffee pot and a half-empty bag of coffee. The coffee pot still had

grounds dried in the bottom from the last time it was used. Brother-in-law leaned over the side and washed out the dried black grounds in the river. About then he looked up and saw them. They were coming easy along the top of the bank. He knew they weren't wanting to draw attention to themselves.

Brother-in-law raised the lid on the small barrel used to catch rainwater. He could see the cool clean water inside the nearly full barrel. He removed the lid to the pot and dipped the blackened coffee pot into the clear water and filled it most of the way up. He opened the bag of coffee and smelled the contents—he wasn't wanting any of Jack's French coffee this trip. He smiled to himself; it was real coffee. Old, but the real stuff. He dumped a handful of the beans onto the board that ran alongside the boat's port gunnel and started crushing them with the bottom of the pot. After he'd broken them up a bit, he took his hand and swept them into the open pot. About then, Billy and Jack were coming aboard. Brother-in-law set the pot on the boiler's steam manifold as he said, "About time you two were getting' here. Thought maybe you weren't interested in a good salvage run this mornin'."

Ignoring Brother-in-law's remark, Jack went straight to business. "Billy, tie down that safety."

Jack climbed up in the pilothouse atop the main cabin. The rear window slid open, and he pointed out toward the wharf. "Brother-in-law, cast off them shore lines. Let's get underway."

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Both men went to work without a word. They'd done this before, but there was a little more excitement this time out. The ropes hit the deck with a soft thud as they were thrown onto the boat. Billy opened the main steam to the piston, and the Mary E's paddle slowly came to life and started pushing the boat away from the wharf. Brother-in-law had to jump quick-like to get aboard as the paddles picked up power moving the water behind the boat to the south, and the packet boat set off on her run upriver.

Jack pulled the plug on the speaking tube and pursed his lips in a way to blow down the tube into the boiler room. The sharp chirp sound of the whistle got Brother-in-law's attention as he pulled the whistle plug. "Lay on them bellows an' keep an eye on the pressure gauge. Make quick down there! We got time to make up! When we're clear of the first turn in the river, lay on the coal to the firebox and pump the bellows till she burns hot!"

Jack liked giving orders. His two-man crew already knew the drill so they paid no nevermind to his yelling down at them. The firebox roared as the black iron door was opened, and flames escaped out each time the bellows blew fresh oxygen into the hot bed of wood and ash. Red-hot already, changing the water inside the boiler into steam power, feeding the steam engine's piston that turned the paddle wheels. The boat began moving forward against the river's current.

It wasn't long till the Mary E cleared the first turn and twenty shovelfuls of coal were sent flying into the open mouth of the

firebox, and fire belched out each time a shovelful was thrown in. The metal door made a clanging sound when Brother-in-law closed it. Now he just needed to watch the pressure gauge and the boiler's water level, and they would be on their way. When the boat had a full head of steam he'd untie the safety. A tied-down safety sent many boats to the bottom when the over-pressurized boiler ruptured and caused devastating destruction. Boats and crewmen sank to the bottom.

Jack loved the sound of his boat when she was running fast and true on the river in the quiet morning. The river lay glass-smooth before him as he steered into the main channel. His boat had a sweet rhythmic sound when she was working good. The steam vented off the engine's poppet valves at exacting intervals almost singing to him as the boat moved along. The bucket boards made little sound going in, but broke out of the water with a frenzy of scattering droplets and froth flying behind her as she traveled.

Jack slid the front glass open. As clean morning air blew across his face, he took a deep breath and looked ahead for any sign of emergent danger. The Mary E was making good speed, but daylight had come, and Jack knew there was a chance that a boat coming downriver from the north might lay over and her crewmembers could go aboard the wreck and take some salvage for themselves. He had to know how long till he'd reach the grounded boat.

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Jack looked below him and saw Billy making his way along the lower deck. “Billy! Pull out that... Oh, that speed thing you made last run, and tell me how fast we’re movin’ upriver.”

Billy’d spent some time at sea in his early days, hoping to see the world. First big storm aboard a clipper out of New Orleans bound for Houston and he learned his stomach and legs weren’t made for the open sea. Riverin’ was a better way for him to make a living. But while at sea, he did learn to fashion a rope device that, when thrown over the stern and timed, could calculate a ship’s speed on the water. Last run he made one to show Jack how it worked. He opened the rope locker and rummaged around a few minutes until he found the device. He called up to Jack, “I found it.” Jack just smiled and motioned for him to toss the thing over and give him a speed.

Billy unwound the rope from around the small board that was weighted on one side. The rope was fed through a hole just large enough for it to pass through and was knotted to hold fast on the other side. Then he leaned over the starboard side and released the weighted board. It pulled the rope with it as the board held flat against the water’s resistance easing the rope from his hands. Billy counted in his head to mark a time for 30 seconds as the rope, with a knot tied at every forty-seven feet, slid through his fingers. He remembered the number of knots that passed through his hands as he kept time, and at the end of the thirty seconds, he used a formula to calculate a rough speed. As Billy started winding the rope through

his hand and around his elbow, he called up to the wheelhouse, "Jack, we're making a little over five knots."

Jack pulled out his pocket watch and looked at the time. It was 7:30. He looked at the shore, gauged his position from the wreck site, and quietly calculated the distance to go. "We'll be there a little before nine." He softly added aloud to himself, "That's good time on a smooth river for the Mary E."

Jack looked ahead of the boat as he was entering the longest straight stretch on the river. Most river men called it The Shoot. Straight and true, it had a good bottom and deep water in the channel. Just one place in The Shoot river men knew to avoid. Long before anyone working on the river today could remember, on the Ohio side of the river, about halfway through, the hillside gave way and produced a massive rockslide. Over time, the soft river bottom gave way to the weight of the big rocks, and they slowly settled into the bottom mud. When the river was at normal level the large rocks were hidden just below the surface, and it was only in the driest of years that the massive stones could be seen barely touching the surface. Over time, the water's swift spring currents moved some of the boulders as far as one hundred feet out into the open river. The old river pilots refer to them as the Bastard Stones because nobody claims them or wants them. All who pilot that long stretch of water know to stay to the West Virginia side to avoid any problems with the Bastard Stones.

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Jack had owned the Mary E for nearly ten years, and he thought about the story of how he acquired her and how the new design made her invaluable in his work. During the spring flood in 1883, a boat called the Bentley Jones was pulled from its moorings upriver and was carried downriver until flood waters brought it into old man Pendergrass's cornfield on the south side of Parlorton. She washed up against a couple old locust trees that stand in the far side of the field. The trees held the boat fast against the rising water and swift current. Her port side pushed up against the trees, and she rested safe there in the heavy waters throughout the flooding river's rise. But, as the water started to drop, the boat's safe hold against the trees started working against it. As the water dropped, the trees held fast to the port side letting the starboard side fall with the water. After about three feet of drop, the river water began washing over the starboard side and ran down into the lower boat, flooding it. The weight of the water pulled the boat off the trees and sank it where the Bentley sat. When the flood water receded, the Bentley Jones lay a hundred yards from the river's edge and on its side against the two trees in the muddy cornfield.

The Bentley Jones was owned by the Jones Steamboat Company in the south end of Wheeling just below the creek. After the Civil War, some local businessmen saw the opportunity to build a large foundry to make machine parts for the growing industrial manufacturers in the area. Pittsburgh was becoming an industrial giant in the region due to the steel and coal businesses. Jones and

others believed that Wheeling could also be guided into being an industrial leader of the times. In 1881, one of the partners, William Jones, decided they should expand the business into steamboat building to accommodate the growing river trade route. He hoped the development of a newer and faster steamboat could revitalize the traffic on the river. River travel was hampered by the changing water conditions over the four seasons and the debris that sometimes made travel dangerous. He believed the manufacturing site's close proximity to the river was ideal for the new business to begin and grow. Jones believed the government would someday build dams on the river to increase its depth, which would mean boats could move over the water for more months out of the year.

The other partners weren't as eager to go into boat building as was Jones. They believed the railroads were where the future industrial growth would come from. After a long battle in the boardroom, it was decided that the other partners would buy out Jones. Part of the deal was that Jones could continue his steamboat business on the south side of the land owned by the partnership, and the manufacturing company would supply the metal for his new steamboat company. Over time, they'd expand into building steam boilers for trains, industry, farming, and of course, steamboats. The future for steam engines was one area that the whole group of businessmen agreed was going to be profitable in the future.

In the spring of 1882, the Jones Steamboat Company was founded, and the original manufacturing company was renamed

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Bentwood Steam Engine and Foundry. Jones had a vision for a new faster steamboat that could run the waterways in almost all river conditions. He envisioned a boat with a much shallower draft that would ride high in the water to avoid sandbars and river snags. The hull design would taper gradually back from the bow so when the boat was up to speed, she would, in a sense, ride up on the water and not plow through it. Coal would feed into the firebox from two bunkers built into the design of the boat. This change would require only one engineer to operate the boilers and engine if needed. Everything about the small prototype design was to show more efficiency in the future full size models.

This bottom hull design had its own problems when it came to steering the boat in the occasional tricky changing river currents. Jones built the small prototype to test the hull design in actual service on the river. This engineering concept helped to eliminate many problems in the early smaller-size designs. A small vertical rotary steam engine from Sweden was used for some of the first tests. It had its own problems, but still it helped to power his earlier test-boats' designs.

Jones discovered that, since his design didn't run deep in the water, it tended to go sideways when moving forward in swift water and when maneuvering near shore. He fixed the problem in a couple ways. The keel ridge of the boat was extended by eight inches. This change helped in swift water but not when maneuvering near shore. He considered moving the rudders forward of the rear paddle but

eventually decided to leave them behind the paddle and to place an extra small set of rudders in the middle area of the boat. The pilot could instruct the engineer to engage the small set of rudders when needed. The mid-rudders helped to eliminate the problem.

A young engineer who worked for Jones wanted to split the paddle into two separate drives and designed a clutching system that drove both paddles from one engine to keep down the weight. With the two clutches engaged together, the paddles would run both drives, synchronized. By slightly disengaging one of the clutches, the engineer could use the paddles to help the pilot maneuver, in close to shore, or in swift water.

Jones had one setback during the design and building of the Bentley. He'd read about the development of a new steam rotary engine and hoped to use it in his boat's design. It was an innovative design that could develop great power by using a heavy flywheel to transfer power from the engines to the boat's paddle wheel to greatly increase torque to the drive assembly. Although the engine was being designed for stationary use, Jones hoped he could make it work for his boat. To use the heavier rotary engine, Bentley greatly increased the structural integrity of the lower hull.

During an early test, the engine's flywheels developed cracks from the centrifugal force during a test run of the boiler and engine. Unable to delay while he solved the flywheel problems, he decided to go with the standard non-condensing steam engine and hoped it would have the power to drive his twin-paddle design. It was later

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discovered the test on the original engine was done without the engine being connected to the paddle wheel. The rotary engine overran its design's speed causing the cracks. Most likely it would have worked as designed if the engine had been connected to the paddle assembly controlling the speed at which it spun.

This new and innovatively designed steamboat could revolutionize the cargo boat business on the shallow river. So during the late fall of 1882, the first prototype was built. Jones put all his finances into making the new design work. He called his first steamboat the Bentley Jones after his father. She was 80 feet long and 30 feet wide, with two decks. The pilothouse was topside toward the front part of the boat. The pilothouse extended two feet on either side of the top deck. That extra two feet allowed the pilot to see both forward and aft when maneuvering.

Most of the main deck was open for cargo, and the boiler deck, or second deck, had a few rooms for travelers. A small room for dining was near the front. The dining area was surrounded by windows so passengers could look out and enjoy the river in cooler weather. This was mostly for the investors' comfort on the initial first run, not for everyday practicality. The Bentley Jones was built to impress the investors Jones badly needed to make his business grow. His capital was totally invested in the Bentley. In terms of steamboats on the Ohio that ran from Pittsburgh to Cincinnati, she was a small boat, but Jones had hoped she would impress those who saw her run.

With investors' money, Jones hoped to finish design work on the rotary steam engine along with a single-drive transmission that could power two paddles simultaneously but operate independently. The earlier design for the Bentley was good, but after it was built, he understood how to improve the clutching mechanism.

In early February of 1883, the Bentley Jones made its first run from Wheeling to Pittsburgh, carrying prospective investors. Jones hoped his arrival in Pittsburgh would be heralded as a major improvement for steamboats. He hoped industrial investors would be on hand, along with reporters from the newspapers. The run from Wheeling to Pittsburgh was a distance of nearly ninety miles—a distance he hoped to cover in less than ten hours, but it was an ambitious undertaking on the river, even in good weather. The non-condensing steam engine's design was a hindrance with only extremely cold water as the feed for the boilers. The non-condensing engines of the time were driven by steam from boilers. The engine's design exhausted the spent steam after use. This inefficient method of driving the engine required water to constantly be maintained at proper temperature and safe boiler pressure level. River water temperatures could drop into the low forties in the winter months and required more fuel to heat the water to maintain enough pressure.

To offset this problem during his winter test, Jones decided to mount two water tanks just a little forward of midship and fill them ahead of the start time. This allowed circulation of the water through

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the boiler to preheat the boiler's feed water. His head structural engineer told him he needed to place them ten feet further toward the bow due to the hull's structural supports. The Bentley was designed as a prototype, not as a boat built to carry two 1500-gallon water tanks which sat side by side. The end result of placing the tanks forward proved to be critical in the test run.

At daylight on February 2, 1883, the Bentley cast off to make her run to Pittsburgh. The hope was to make it to the destination before dark. Jones hoped the city's lights would be a guide for the last part of the trip.

From the start, the run north was in trouble. The heavy water tanks helped the performance of the engines, but the weight of the water pushed the bow lower than expected. The Bentley plowed through the water much like any other steamer would. Near Steubenville, the clutch on the port side began slipping, making the boat even harder to steer in the cold river water. By that time, the investors were more interested in drinking Jones's whiskey than investing in his new boat design. The speed of the passage had to be cut to almost nothing to manage steering the vessel. Somewhere along the river, they drained the heavy weight from the water tanks, but by then all interest by investors was gone and the smell of coal smoke and burning clutch material filled the small front cabin area on occasion. Early the next morning, the Bentley Jones limped into port near the Point in Pittsburgh.

The clutch was repaired and other adjustments were made in hope of making a run south with at least some of the investors. No one was interested. The investors returned by railroad. The irony was that the 1880's river transport was indeed already losing out to the more efficient railroads. Jones's boat made the run back to Wheeling with a disheartened Jones and the crew as her only passengers, and Jones's dream nearly died that day. In some great quirk of fate, the Bentley performed as planned on her return trip and made the downriver run in just under nine hours.

With his former partners having turned their backs on Jones, and without investors, he was in deep financial trouble. His lawyer advised him to file bankruptcy, but Jones wasn't ready to give up—after all, he still had the Bentley Jones, and she truly was a good design. So Jones kept his dream alive with the hope to build a full-size version of the Bentley—if only he could find some backing... His stubborn hope lasted right up until the night a few weeks later when heavy rain brought the river to flood stage, and the Bentley's shore lines somehow pulled free. She disappeared downriver in the darkness, with the last vestiges of Jones's hope aboard.

When they found her, the insurance company representative told Jones his boat was of an experimental nature and that: 'Under Section 7, Article 3, it states: Any modification to a mechanical device not properly inspected and approved by the insurance company's board of review, deems the company exempt from responsibility in the case of loss, and it will not cover said loss in the

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event of a claim.' The insured would have 30 days to appeal any such ruling.

Jones did appeal, and the insurance company denied his request. Jones was wiped out. His investors wanted to put him in jail for fraud. No one knows for sure whatever became of Jones. Some say he left on the midnight train to Baltimore with his wife and two carpetbags.

The steamboat Bentley Jones was carried downriver nearly forty miles just below Parlorton and came to rest, lying sideways, in a cornfield. She became a great spectacle for the local folks to come and see after the flood, and people came by the wagonloads to view the wrecked boat. Some said the farmer was going to burn it to clear his field and sell the scrap iron to cover his crop loss. The flood occurred in late February, so there was no crop in the farmer's West Virginia field for which to claim a loss, and the insurance company lost no cargo. The only loss was the experimental boat—a loss which they did not cover.

Jack was between jobs at the time of the flood. He'd worked most of the past year on a salvage boat, the Dixie Lee out of Parkersburg. He'd hoped this spring to get work on one of the government snag-puller boats that worked the river to remove trees and root balls from the river channel. It was good work and the government always paid on time. But when he saw the small steamer lying in the field, the salvager inside him came up with a plan. In

Chuck Clegg

Jack's mind, she could be salvageable, but the first problem was to come to some sort of understanding with the farmer.

Chapter 3

The Wreck

“Is that coffee ready yet?” Jack called to Brother-in-law, who was putting the deck to rights in order to make room for the salvaged cargo waiting upriver.

“Most likely it is,” he called back up as he entered the boiler room to get Jack and himself a cup of hot coffee. They’d have some time to enjoy a cup and think about the wrecked Miss Boston not too far upriver and what was ahead of them.

The Mary E was making good time, and it should be around a couple more turns in the river before they saw the Boston. Billy and his brother-in-law came up to the pilothouse and were sitting on the lazy bench enjoying the view and talking about the money they hoped to make. Brother-in-law looked toward the riverbank and recognized a big old sycamore tree leaning heavy out over the river. They should soon see if the wreck lay just beyond the next bend. They held their breath hoping she was still there and no other salvagers—or even worse, a boatload of insurance people—had found her.

As they rounded the turn, they could see what they’d come upriver for. There she was, the Miss Boston sitting high on her starboard side. Billy and Brother-in-law stepped out onto the narrow extension on the side of the wheelhouse to get a better view. She was just where Brother-in-law had left her last night. The good news

was no other boat could be seen around her. Bad news was, she had started to turn in the current and was lying at about a ten-degree list to her port side. The stern had twisted out into the channel and her bow was pointing toward shore. The port side had water five feet up on her deck. She was being twisted by the current and in danger of rolling into the deep channel. If she rolled in the current, she'd be a total loss. But if she only washed into deep water with her stack still upright, the cargo would be close, but hard to get to.

The Boston rose thirty feet to her top deck out of the water. The depth in the main channel was only twenty feet at best. She'd disappear into the river if she rolled on her side. The weight of the boat and the current would crush the upper wooden decks, and she would be totally destroyed.

"Damn, I'd hoped t' put our bow up against hers." Jack had figured, if he could put the two boats together bow to bow, he'd not have to worry about the Boston rolling into him, but now he was going to have to run up onto her front deck and tie off. If she moved or rolled, the Mary E would be held fast and be in danger of being pulled down with the wreck.

"Brother-in-law, get below to the engine room. This is gonna be tricky." And, to Billy, "You go with Brother-in-law and pull the ashes and vent some steam to help slow our approach. Listen for the bells. I'll signal 'DEAD SLOW' at about twenty feet to slow us down. It might take a couple tries.

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The bells were how the pilot signaled to the engineer in the boat's engine room. Different bells told the engineer what the pilot wanted him to do. Jack moved to the starboard side of the wheelhouse and kicked the lazy bench out of the way. He wanted to be able to steer while looking over the side to see the exact speed in the water. His goal was to slow to a point where the current and the boat's speed held her in place until she was, in a sense, stopped in the water. Jack pushed the brake pedal sounding a bell below telling Billy to slow the engine's rotation.

The sound of water disappearing under the Mary E faded away as she slowed in the current. Trick was to slow to a point where she held fast but still maintain power to maneuver in the current. This was extra tricky when holding in midstream with the Boston kicking current off her stern disrupting the river's normal flow. But soon the Mary E was holding fast in the middle of the river. She was slowly being pushed toward the far shore by the current coming off the Boston. Jack wanted to let the current turn his boat just a little and then he'd ring 'SLOW' to Billy.

He walked out onto the small overhang, looked down on the river, and then toward the back of the boat. He could tell by looking at the small swirls of water coming off her stern how his boat was turning with the current. On the starboard side, the water swirled as it slid along the side and kicked off near the stern. After gauging the drift, he quickly went to port and looked at the water. It was smooth and passing with little to no resistance given way by the water.

He went back in and rang the bell twice to signal Billy to go 'AHEAD SLOW.' The stopping bell was used to signal 'STOP' if the boat was moving. If it's stopped, it tells the engineer to move forward. Billy knew Jack had his bow lined up with the Boston's front deck and they were moving in.

If they ran up on her too hard, she could dislodge and come off all of a sudden-like. This was going to be a tricky operation. Billy looked over at Brother-in-law and said, "Stick your head out and give me distance to the Boston."

Brother-in-law stepped to the door on the port side and began calling out distance, "Two hundred feet."

While waiting for the next call for distance, and as the pitman arm slowly moved back and forth, there was an almost rhythmic sound of steam releasing from the poppet valves. The chirp of a sharp whistle broke the moment. It was Jack on the speaking tube from the wheelhouse. Billy pulled the whistle plug and called back up, "Whatta ya want Jack?"

Billy put his ear next to the tube to hear Jack over the sounds in the engine room. "When I signal 'STOP,' give it to me for ten seconds, and then engage the reversing engine for about the same time. That should let us drift in gentle against the front deck."

Billy acknowledged up to Jack, "Okay."

Brother-in-law called out, "One hundred feet!" Again in the background, the hissing sound of steam venting from the engine.

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With the clang of the stop bell, Billy disengaged the engine. A momentary release of steam could be heard in a loud steady roar. In his head he began to count, "One, two, three..."

About then, Brother-in-law yelled, "Fifty feet!"

Billy continued to count, "...four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten."

The strong muscles in his arms gleamed with sweat as he pulled the reversing lever. He watched as the connecting arm stopped and then slowly started in the opposite direction. He could feel the ever-so-gentle pull of the paddles straining against the water behind the boat. Again, he counted, "One, two, three, four..." Before he could complete his count, the 'STOP' bell chimed out. He immediately disengaged the reversing engines.

Brother-in-law called out over the sudden release of steam, "Were closin' on her front deck." He disappeared out the door and ran forward to jump aboard and secure the bow lines to the deck of the Boston.

As gentle as any pilot ever put the bow of his boat into a difficult place, Jack and his crew did. When she came upon the Boston, the wreck stopped her forward motion; it was almost imperceptible. Billy idled the engine and vented the steam out into the morning air. He grabbed a coil of line as he went to help Brother-in-law secure the Mary E to the Boston's front deck.

Jack walked out to the port side and looked down into the water. He wanted to see if he'd discolored the water by disturbing bottom

mud. He had. This wasn't a good place to be; he must have fouled the shallow water with his approach, which meant the Mary E's bow moved soft mud, or he'd moved the Boston a little when he ran up on her. Either way, he and his boat were not in a good place.

Jack looked down on the two men below securing his boat to the Boston's front deck. The heavy list of the Boston made it a little difficult to walk on the wooden deck.

"Billy, make sure the fire axe is close at hand and sharp. If that damn wreck starts t' move, we gotta get off fast." Billy threw up his hand in acknowledgment. He realized that with a boat listing that much and sitting sideways to the current, they were in a bad way, especially tied to a disabled wreck.

Jack stepped back for a moment and looked at the ill-fated steamer. She was once a grand boat carrying cargo and passengers on the Ohio. The life of a steamboat was said to be less than five years for most. Boiler explosions and river snags took more than their share of the beautiful riverboats. Snag pullers worked to keep the main channels open for safe passage in the good season of the year, but their job of cleaning the river was an unending task. Each spring, new floods eroded sandy riverbanks. As the sand washed away, trees that once gracefully stood overlooking the river fell into the muddy waters and often settled out to where the current slowed and became sunken dangers to passing steamboats.

Looking at the Boston's predicament reminded Jack of when he first saw his own boat stranded in a field up against trees and far

from the river. The Bentley Jones had come to rest on nearly a thirty-degree angle as the flood waters retreated and left her port side up against the trees. Due to the small disclaimer clause in the contract that relieved the insurance company of responsibility in the event of loss, there were no ownership claims. The investors to whom Jones owed money had no desire to spend more on trying to salvage her; they weren't interested in ownership, they were only interested in financial compensation. The final determination was to turn the wreck over to the farmer who, as landowner, had the right to file a claim to cover his so-called crop losses. The Bentley Jones was legally his, and her fate was in his hands.

Upon learning all this information, Jack came up with a plan in hopes of making a deal with the farmer to buy the boat. There were two small problems. The Bentley Jones lay a hundred yards from water, and the farmer may not want to sell her outright but sell the metal and hardware for salvage instead.

Old man Pendergrass had farmed the river bottoms for many springs where corn grew tall, if left undisturbed. But most years, flood water rose over the farmland, and each time it did, it claimed a corn crop as payment for a new rich layer of topsoil. For Pendergrass that was a bad thing, but for Jack's plan, it was a good thing.

For old man Pendergrass, salvaging the Bentley Jones for metal would take a good bit of help and cost real money for wages. Then there were the wagons needed to haul the scrap to the rail depot,

metal-cutting equipment to get it apart, and a couple good teams of horses, which by the way, Pendergrass did own. That was good; Jack also needed them in his plan.

Oh, one other thing on Jack's side, old man Pendergrass had a taste for the bottle—especially the good store-bought, tax-paid kind of whiskey.

So Jack waited, and right on time, Pendergrass made his evening tour of the land-locked boat. He tried to catch people on his land and charge them for the privilege of seeing “the boat in a tree” as the locals called it. It was time for Jack to do some of his best horse trading with a bottle of old Kentucky sipping whiskey.

“Evenin’, Mr. Pendergrass,” Jack called out to the man as he walked near the busted paddle.

Pendergrass could not see well and hollered, “Who’s there? You’re a trespassin’ iffin’ you’re here t’ see my boat.”

Jack held the bottle in such a way the cranky old man could see it, even if he didn’t recognize Jack yet. “It’s me, Mr. Pendergrass, Jack Dulin. You remember? I worked for you a few years back pullin’ stumps in this field with that fine pair o’ work horses you own. Them has to be some o’ the finest horses I’ve seen in these parts. Yes sir, that hard work paid off and now you sure have a fine cornfield. Yes sir, valuable land, and this boat had t’ go and ruin the best cornfield I’ve ever seen. I bet you get a bumper crop every year.”

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Pendergrass was more interested in the bottle Jack had than talking about his field. "What you got there, Jack?" he asked as he pointed toward the bottle.

Jack realized that the field was a good one, and that the spring rains almost always washed away the crops Pendergrass planted, but this plan was about making Pendergrass feel good about his land and making him see the boat could ruin it for him. "I got me some Kentucky sippin' whiskey. Headed home t' sit and enjoy the nice evenin'. We don't get many as nice as this, and I figured I'd celebrate with a little o' the finest. Lot better tastin' than that stuff they sell as medicine bitters. Strong tastin', not smooth like this sippin' whiskey."

By now Pendergrass was licking his lips and thinking about how to get a taste of that whiskey Jack was carrying. Then Jack put the second part of his plan in motion. "I'm not much on drinkin' alone. Would ya mind if we go over and sit on the riverbank and enjoy the nice evenin'. And, oh yeah, have a drink with me?"

For an old man Pendergrass could move pretty fast. He covered that hundred yards as fast as a man half his age! Must've been that he didn't want to miss the sunset that nice evening on the river.

Jack and his new friend laughed and talked about corn, horses, the river, and good sipping whiskey, even if it was taxed by the government. Finally Jack eased his way around to the problem of the boat in his good cornfield. After lots of good whiskey, a nice sunset, a quiet river, and of course Jack doing some fancy talking, he

convinced Pendergrass he had a good deal for him. Sell Jack the boat as is and rent him the cornfield for one year. Come the following spring rains, Jack would move the boat out of the field in the flood waters. In return, Pendergrass would be a twenty-percent partner with Jack the first year he salvaged the river. Oh yeah, Jack would throw in a case of sipping whiskey for the next five years. Jack just happened to have paper and pencil with him. The two men wrote out the contract and signed it. Deal done and whiskey gone, Jack owned the Bentley Jones. One of the first things he did was rename her the Mary E and file claim papers with the county.

Jack called down to Billy as he looked over at the wreck of the Boston, "Go along the starboard side and see if you an' Brother-in-law can get inside the cargo hold an' tell how much water's in it."

Billy and Brother-in-law laid their shoes on the front deck of the Mary E. Now in their bare feet, that gave them a little better traction on the wooden deck as they made their way along the far side. Jack could no longer see them. The angle of the deck and the water in the lower side made the starboard side the only access to the boat. The Miss Boston was nearly one hundred and eighty feet long and weighed nearly two hundred tons afloat. Now, with her bottom supported only in the middle and extra water inside her, the increased stress on the main keel made her in danger of breaking in the middle.

Jack tied the wheel off and began making his way down onto the deck. He was just coming out of the stairwell when the Boston shifted and rolled a few more degrees toward his boat. Jack grabbed

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the railing to steady himself as he looked for the axe just in case he needed to cut his boat free. The sound of wood busting and cracking came from inside the damaged boat. The weight of the water and her only being supported near her midpoint was more stress than the hull could handle. Jack grabbed the axe and stood ready to cut away if she moved again. All was quiet again, just the occasional sound of the Mary E's poppet valves opening on the boiler to relieve steam.

Jack called out, "You'ens okay over there?"

No sound came back for a moment. Then from the far side Brother-in-law hollered, "Jack, bring the small deck boat around t' this side. No way can we carry these boxes along this tilted deck."

Jack didn't like this at all, leaving his boat tied to a dying vessel to go around the far side. If the Boston started to move or roll, who was going to be on board to cut her loose and save his boat? But, if he didn't take the risk, there'd be no salvage from the stricken boat. He paused a moment. "I gotta do this," he said out loud as he laid down the axe and headed for the small wooden boat near the stern.

Quickly he slid the small boat into the water, fixed the oars in the yokes, and began pulling toward the far side of the Boston. As he came around the starboard side, the steamer's bottom loomed high overhead. Two heads looked down on the small boat's approach.

"Jack, we can get to the whiskey, not sure about the cigars."

"Stop talkin' and start lowerin' down the cases. We'll worry about what we can get as we go. This boats breakin' in half and when she does, she'll spill her guts and maybe pull the Mary E down

with her, so hurry up!" Jack moved the boat in close and the two on deck began to lower cases of whiskey down into the boat. Jack filled the boat and began the journey back for the unloading.

The morning sun was hot on the water and the reflection hurt Jack's eyes. He pulled his shirt off and reached his hand into the water to splash it on his skin to help cool himself down. Finally he lay up beside the Mary E and tied off the ropes. One by one, he lifted the cases onto the deck until his boat was empty. He cast off the lines and returned to the far side of the steamer. As he pulled up, the two men above looked down at Jack who'd removed his shirt in the hot sun. They'd forgotten how badly Jack's body was scarred. His arms and hands from the steel mill, but the scars on his back and chest were from the war. Jack had never spoken of how he came about those. And, the two men who were his friends never asked.

Jack never asked about Brother-in-law's one ear, so Brother-in-law never asked Jack about the scars. Just a showing of a little mutual respect.

The two quickly lowered case after case and Jack hauled the wooden boxes back to his boat, where he just pushed them on deck. He started near the front and worked his way to the back. He lost track of the trips, concentrating on getting the boat off-loaded and watching for movement in the sand. If the Boston moved, the bottom sand would stir up, and he would see that quickly.

He looked up at the sun and knew it was nearing noon. They were doing good, lots of cargo off-loaded, and the Boston hadn't

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moved since that first time. As he rounded the boat he looked at the two on deck looking over. Each had a cigar in his mouth. "Want one Jack?"

Jack looked up and was not amused, "No, get them over the side and hurry up. I thought I heard a boat whistle."

Boat whistle sounds in the valley could be deceiving. They echoed off the hills and made it hard for a man to judge where she was until he saw her. Regardless, a steam whistle meant another boat was coming. Could be a steamer out of Wheeling or a salvage boat full of insurance people. Either way, time was passing and cargo had to be off-loaded.

By now Jack had kind of forgotten about the Boston's predicament, too busy moving boxes from the Boston back to the Mary E. This trip, he counted the cases of whiskey on the deck—nearly a hundred. And, with eight bottles in each case that was, well, he'd figure that later. He'd also worry later about how many boxes of cigars they'd salvaged.

The next time he positioned himself below the two men; fancy wooden cases started being lowered. "What in blazes is this stuff?"

About that time Billy poured something on Jack from above. "You'll smell real pretty now, Jack." The smell reminded him of the fancy cathouse he'd visited in his younger days.

"Damn you Billy! Don't be pourin' that stuff on me! And besides, what do we want this junk for?"

Billy grinned really big. "This stuff'll sell for more than the whiskey will."

Brother-in-law shouted down, "Them fine ladies in the big city pay high dollars for this stuff, especially in hot weather. This stuff came all the way from Paris, France. Not like that stuff they sell in town." The two men continued lowering the fancy wooden box with foreign writing on the sides that Jack couldn't understand.

"Jack, water's too high to find much else below. We're gonna try and go up into the upper decks and see if we can find anythin'."

Jack hollered back, "No, we're gonna cut loose before she moves again. The sand is startin' to kick up; somethin's happenin'."

Brother-in-law leaned out further over the side. "Might be payroll on board."

Jack stopped rowing and looked back, "Whatta ya mean, payroll? Why didn't ya say somethin' earlier?"

Brother-in-law looked both ways as if someone was going to hear him. "There was those that said this boat carried the payroll to the Muskingum City boatyard. Two hundred men work there. Could be big money."

Jack pointed upriver, "You hear that? That's a steamboat, and she's comin'." Brother-in-law looked upriver for the boat. "She's not too far. Do you know where the money would be kept?" Jack turned his small rowboat to face the two men up on deck.

Brother-in-law nodded his head, indicating he did. "Well, make it quick then," Jack told the two of them. They disappeared up the

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steps as Jack began rowing back to the *Mary E* once again. This time Jack pulled up alongside his boat and tied off to the deck kevel near the middle of his boat. He moved quickly pushing the salvage cargo back away from the sides. Again he heard the sound of a boat's whistle, but this time he could see dark smoke from the boat's stacks shooting skyward just over the bend in the river.

He watched as the steamer emerged from the turn into the main channel. She was running fast and toward the far side. It was the Big River out of Wheeling, most likely heading downriver to Muskingum City. She was throwing a big wake with her bow and adding to it with her side paddles. Jack knew the wash from the big, fast-moving boat could move the *Boston* from its precarious perch on the sandbar. He yelled for Billy and brother-in-law. No answer. They were somewhere inside the big steamer, insulated from sound.

The Big River didn't know she was coming up on the *Boston's* wreck or she would have slowed down far back upriver. It takes a steamer a full mile or better running downriver to stop. She would be long past before she could even react to the *Boston's* situation.

Jack moved toward the bow, took the axe, began chopping one of the heavy cable lines, and it cut free after a couple swings. He next went for the second line and cut it as quickly. He paused for a moment. He could see the Big River—almost across the river from the *Mary E* when she sounded her whistle, blowing continually. She was moving fast and pulling lots of water away from the stranded *Boston*. The deck of the distant steamer came alive with crew and

passengers who wanted to see the wrecked Boston and Jack's small workboat tied together in the river bend.

About then Jack could see several big wakes of water rippling toward the stern of the Boston. When the pressure waves hit the steamer's drive paddles, their force started them moving as if the dead boat was coming to life. The sounds of busting wood and big timbers breaking could be heard over the sound of the waves now hitting the side of the Mary E. Jack ran up into the engine room, opened the damper doors, and closed the steam release valves. He pulled the engine reversing lever two notches, and he saw the pitman arm begin to slowly ease back and forth moving the long connecting arm to the paddles. He could feel the paddles at the stern begin to rotate slowly. He had no choice. Without someone to monitor the engine controls and someone else to pilot the boat, he and his boat were in trouble.

He felt the Mary E pull back off the Boston's front deck. He turned to see the pressure gauge. It read 100 pounds; he realized that letting the water cool in the boiler allowed the steam to vent for too long. Nothing he could do now, so he turned and ran toward the front looking for his two friends. As he came out on the port deck he saw the bow had become entangled in the cabling from the Boston's front gangplank rigging. He looked for his two friends. They were nowhere in sight.

Then a great shudder ripped through the Boston, and the stern of the boat began to break away. The weight of the paddles began to

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pull the stern section off the sandbar and into the current. The water pressure wave from the Big River caused the Boston's nearly sunken stern to swing slowly around and into the side of the Mary E, dislodging her from the Boston's bow.

Jack realized that with his boat free he could no longer wait for his friends. He must try and move away from the wreck before the front section rolled onto his boat. He ran for the steps up to the pilothouse and quickly untied the wheel to try to kick the back end of his boat out in the main river channel. She slowly began to move back away from the Boston. Without warning his progress stopped, abruptly and his boat was pulled toward the near shore and the sandbar.

"What the hell?" He looked down toward the bow and saw one last metal cable from the Boston had become entangled in the port keel. The boat was being held fast on the port side, and the pressure wave coming from the starboard was forcing the Mary E—not into the main channel as Jack hoped—but toward the shallow side of the river.

He looked back at the front of the Boston. The current was going to push the front half off the sandbar and into deep water. As it did the boat most likely would begin to roll onto the side. It seemed the whole thing was playing out in slow motion before Jack's eyes. As the Boston approached a sixty-degree angle, her twin stacks gave out a large cracking sound followed by tearing metal as tall stacks ripped away from the Boston's upper deck and fell into the

river. As the stacks fell, a large cloud of dark dust and dirt filled the air along with wooden fragments that were once part of the top deck.

Out in the main river channel, the stern section slowly slid away from the side of the Mary E and down into deeper water. The current could possibly move the back section of the Boston downriver and behind the Mary E. If that happened, it could block Jack's retreat back out into safe water. The steamer Big River was now nearly a half-mile downriver and still unable to stop her downstream progress because of her speed and heavy cargo. She continued to sound her whistle as she moved away.

Jack still couldn't see his two friends. The once beautiful bow of the Boston had slowly rolled nearly ninety degrees now. He could see the door where the two men went into upper deck, but they were nowhere to be seen. He has to maneuver the Mary E, but he can't, not while still entangled to the Boston's bow cables. If he continues backing with the entangled cable on one side of his boat it could pull his stern toward the shallows. He has to get free of the Boston.

Jack pulled the wheel to the right moving the rudders hard over to try and steer the Mary E into the main channel. If he could only free her tangled bow keel from the Boston's cable rigging, he would have a chance. Tying the wheel down, he turned to see where the stern section of the Boston was. Slowly, the sunken wreck had moved out into the main channel away from Jack's stern. It was beginning to look as if the wreck would not affect his boat's retreat if he could get free of the Boston's rigging. The floating wreck was

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underwater with only her upper deck bobbing above the river's surface. Jack could see the top section shudder each time the heavy stern contacted the river bottom. He realized the steamer's paddle section was acting like a rolling wheel, and as long as the midsection remained buoyant, the stern section would sawyer on the paddle assembly in the green water. She would eventually come to rest on the bottom downriver in the big turn.

Jack had to get to the front of the boat and cut free the heavy cable holding fast to the bow kevel. The kevel was built into the structure of his boat and gave it its strength to secure the heavy lines used to tie her off to the shore lines. It would likely hold fast and pull the Mary E, along with the sinking Boston, into deep water. As he came onto the main deck he paused for a moment. He thought to himself, *Should I disengage the slow turnin' paddle or cut loose the tangled bow cable?* He quickly decided to cut the cable first.

As he came onto the front deck he stopped to look at the bow section of the Boston looming in front of him. The massive boat was almost lying directly on its side just ten feet from the front of his boat, and she was holding steady for the moment. If she continued over, the front section would fall onto the deck of his boat if still tangled. He grabbed the axe and started chopping at the heavy steel cable that held taut between the two boats. The cable was run from his front kevel up to the rigging on the Boston's bow. Every time he hit the cable, it sprang like a banjo string being plucked. It seemed

impossible to cut the cable with no solid backing to chop against, but still he tried.

Without warning, the sounds of steel bending and wood decking breaking rang out. The front winch assembly on the Boston had torn loose and its wreckage was raining down around Jack. When he looked up the cable was loose and running over the bow to the sunken rigging. He bent over to try and untangle the loose cable.

As he looked at the shoreline he could see that the Mary E was moving backward toward the channel. She was moving away from the enormous boat that was lying on its side just in front of her. The heavy steel cable was loose, but still its heavy weight was hard to untangle from the kevel. As Jack worked he noticed blood dripping from his hands onto the deck where the sharp torn strands of cable had cut into them. He needed to find something to use as a pry bar to help dislodge the cable. The enormous strain on the kevel had begun to tear it from its deck supports on the Mary E. Much more, and the cable and kevel would both be torn away.

Jack stepped back and made a quick assessment of his boat's position to the towering Boston which sat high on the sandbar. Jack felt some relief that his boat was just far enough back that the wreck wouldn't likely roll onto his front deck. He remembered that inside the engine room he'd earlier seen a pry bar hanging on the bulkhead. He also was concerned about what had happened to his friends. It had only been a few minutes since the Boston began breaking up, but

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it seemed like an eternity to Jack while worrying about the fate of Billy and Brother-in-law.

As Jack entered the engine room, he stopped and decided to disengage the reversing engine for the moment. He pulled the releasing handle and moved the lever to the neutral position. Just then he heard a sound, all too familiar. The Boston was moving. He grabbed the pry bar on the way out the door and ran toward the front of the deck. He stopped. No one had likely seen anything like what Jack was witnessing. The Boston was rolling toward him, and a wave of water would wash over his bow as she settled in—just in front of the Mary E.

The sheer size surprised him as it came crashing down into the deeper water off the edge of the sandbar. The wave swept over the bow and washed most things not secured overboard. The sound of the water rushing out of the Boston's midsection as she sank quickly in front of Jack's was almost deafening. The weight of the boat coming down on top of the Boston's upper levels crushed most of the two decks now below the water's surface. Soon the only sounds were bubbles from the wreckage and pieces of deck boards popping to the surface.

The air was filled with thick black dust from where the stacks pulled free of the Boston's upper deck, and from somewhere in the distance, Jack heard the sound of Billy's voice calling his name.

“Jack! Over here!” Nearly seventy-five yards away, he saw the heads of three people in the water. Three? Who? Where? And something else in the water near them—a dog?

Jack forgot about the cable tangled in his bow kevel as he felt joy that his friends were okay. But who was with them?

“Come and get us. We have somethin’,” Billy called out waving his arms.

What could he have besides an unknown third person in the water with him? Jack thought to himself. For the first time in ten minutes, Jack paused for a moment to determine what to do next. The cable running over the bow to the rigging from the Boston wasn’t a problem for the moment. It was acting like an anchor and would hold until he could get his friends back aboard.

Jacks friends bobbed around on the water and repeatedly yelled, “We have somethin’. We have something’.” And they indicated they didn’t want to swim back to the boat. It was at that time Jack realized how much the raw cuts on his hands hurt from yanking on the cable that was still attached to his bow. But Jack had no gloves to protect his hands while he rowed the small rescue boat out to retrieve his friends, so he made his way to the deckhouse and found a pillow case that he tore into strips to bandage and protect his hands.

Jack then made his way to the small boat tied near the midsection and climbed in while untying the rope. He could see the Boston’s bottom just inches below the water, and bubbles and debris

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continued to rise from the sunken boat as Jack rowed toward the water-treading foursome.

The dog didn't know quite what to do as it awaited rescue, so it swam circles around the three people floating on the surface. The water was just deep enough that they couldn't quite touch bottom. As Jack rowed toward them, he kept looking back at his boat tied to the sunken rigging and the bubbles still coming from the Boston. It somehow didn't seem just right; she should have settled to the bottom by now. He wondered what was giving her such buoyancy.

"Jack, you'll never guess what we found inside the captain's quarters," Brother-in-law said as he spat river water out of his mouth while trying to stay afloat.

"Looks to me like you found a boy and a dog."

"Well yeah, but we found somethin' else too."

Jack looked around the floating adults and helped the boy into the boat. "I don't see anythin' except you all, and I ain't impressed with that."

As Billy was treading water he held up a rope with his right hand and called to Jack, "See? I have it right here."

Jack looked annoyed at Billy, "We have plenty of rope, Billy."

"No! No! It's what's tied to the rope that'll make you happy."

Now he had Jack's attention as he reached to pull Billy into the boat. The whole time the three were climbing into the boat the yellor dog was swimming around.

"Lift that damn dog in here. Not sure why we need a dog, but I ain't lettin' 'im drown." Jack sat back in the boat and adjusted the bandages on his hands that were now red with his blood.

"Jesus, Jack, what happened to your hands?"

"Later. What's on the rope, a catfish?"

Billy and Brother-in-law started to pull on the rope. The weight of whatever they had on the rope's end caused the four people in the boat to adjust position to offset the weight being pulled from below.

"Jack, we got treasure," they said as they struggled to pull the small heavy wooden box into the boat.

Meanwhile the boy and the dog sat quietly in the bow of the small boat. The boy didn't say anything, and he and the dog didn't look the least bit interested in what Billy and Brother-in-law were pulling up.

"There!" Brother-in-law called out as the wooden box broke the water's surface. Jack was interested in what the wooden box had inside that made it so heavy and what made Billy say they had found treasure.

As it came up against the side of the boat it made a sound. Jack recognized that sound. It was the sound of money. Coins, inside a box marked Atlanta Cigar Company. Cigars didn't make that kind of sound. Coins made that kind of sound. The sound from the box that was still draining water was most certainly the sound of coins.

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Billy and Brother-in-law sat looking at Jack with the wooden box sitting on the boat's bottom between them. They were dripping wet, but they each had big grins on their tanned faces.

"All right, I'll agree you might've found treasure, but where'd you find the kid and the dog?" Jack positioned the oars and was preparing to row back to the Mary E when Billy grabbed his hand and stopped him.

"Jack, look at the place this box was bein' shipped to. I'm telling you. We're rich and it's sittin' right here between us."

Jack unwound the bandages from his hand and reached over the side to cup some water up to wash some of the bottom mud off the side of the cigar box. SOUTHERN INVESTMENT COMPANY, Muskingum City, Ohio.

"Jack. What's up with your hands?" Billy asked him again.

"What about the kid?" Jack didn't answer Billy's question, but peered around him to see the boy with his dog sitting quietly, listening to all of this.

"The kid must've been a stowaway, and when the boat went aground and everybody left, he stayed on. I guess he wasn't sure what to do." Billy turned and looked at the kid just sitting there with his dog.

"Well, at least the dog's friendly." The dog's wet tail was slinging water as it swung from side to side. "Not sure about the boy. He ain't said nothin' yet," Brother-in-law said as he took the rope off the box.

Chuck Clegg

Jack wrapped the bloody cloth around his hand and began to row back to the Mary E.

Chapter 4

The Boston Breaches

Billy and Brother-in-law were busily untying the rope from the small wooden box as Jack rowed back toward the waiting boat.

As they passed over the Boston, thousands of bubbles continued to rise from the sunken vessel. The bottom of the boat had to be suspended just below the surface.

“What’s that odd smell?” Brother-in-law asked, as he stuck his nose up in the air. He looked like a rabbit wiggling his nose to sample the strange odor.

“She must have dislodged a bunch o’ bottom gas when she come t’ rest down there,” Billy said as he looked down at the bubble-filled water. The two shrugged, returned to the wooden box, and tried to pull it open with their hands.

Jack looked back at the two and told them to leave it until they got back aboard and got out of there. “I don’t like this. Somethin’s not right here. I wanna get the boat free o’ the Boston’s riggin’, pick up the salvage cargo that washed overboard if we can, and get upriver before dark.”

Brother-in-law questioned, “Upriver? I thought we were gonna sell this downriver in Cincinnati. Have you changed your mind Jack?

We goin' t' Pittsburgh now? There's a gal up there who can really cook."

Billy interrupted Brother-in-law, "You got a gal! You're married to my sister, you low-down varmint!"

Brother-in-law was quick to answer Billy, "No she's not a nighttime gal! She's a gal who cooks for a restaurant. You know, that fancy one just up from the Point. Best cook I ever met. Her fried chicken is the best on the Ohio River anywhere." Brother-in-law rubbed his stomach and licked his lips.

"No!" Jack answered Brother-in-law's question in a short snap. "We're goin' t' Wheeling and try and find out somethin' about this boat and what she was a haulin'. Gotta be more information about her an' the cargo she was carryin'. Remember, there's the crewman you replaced," he said, looking at Brother-in-law. "He may know somethin' since he helped load 'er in Pittsburgh."

The small boat loaded with its four passengers came alongside the Mary E sitting quietly except for the sound of the steam venting from the poppet valve on the engine's steam line. The stern of the boat had drifted in toward the shore because of the cable being wrapped around the port bow kevel. Being tied on only one side caused the boat to drift toward the near shore and shallow water.

Jack climbed back aboard and walked to the bow to assess the boat and its situation. As he stood near the damaged kevel he wondered again about the strange odor hanging in the air and the bubbles still continuing to surface around his boat. The bottom of

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the Boston seemed to be slowly bobbing—rising and falling—just below the surface. When she rose, thousands of bubbles appeared on the surface, and then she'd slowly descend once again. Over and over the same thing repeated itself.

“Get that kid and dog on board and hoist in the boat. I wanna get outta here now!” Jack grabbed the axe and held it out toward Brother-in-law. “When you get secure back there, come up here, and see if you can cut this cable free.”

“What’s your hurry? I don’t hear any boat whistles. And, what else could happen? The Boston’s gone.” Brother-in-law pointed toward the barely visible stern section still walking its way downriver on the paddle wheel.

“My boat, my ass, and I say let’s get outta here.” Jack turned and went toward the pilothouse, checking the bandages on his hands as he went.

“I wonder what happened t’ his hands,” Billy said to Brother-in-law.

It didn’t take long to secure the boat and move the salvage cargo back under the main deck.

Brother-in-law walked toward the front deck, mumbling to himself. “I’ll bet that box is full o’ gold coins. It must weigh near twenty or thirty pounds. Gold twenty-dollar coins. We’re gonna be rich! I can have my new ear, have a bath, and some new store-bought clothes. I’ll be a respectable member o’ the community. They won’t be callin’ me “One-ear” no more. I’ll buy Sarah that

house she always wanted with a little flower garden along the side. Yep, we'll be respectable citizens. Why, I might even become a businessman. Buy and sell." He reached the bow. He found the axe and was surprised to see how damaged its edge was. He couldn't have known the damage was caused when Jack was earlier trying to cut the cables. He remembered that on the far side another axe hung inside the boiler-room door, so he laid down the damaged axe and went for the sharper one.

A strange sound came from in front of the boat. It kind of sounded like Billy's stomach when he ate too many beans down at the food counter. Muddy bubbles began to rise and more gas bubbles came to the surface from where the Boston was lying. Jack heard the sound and looked down just in front of the boat toward the noise and rising bubbles. "Damn you Brother-in-law! Get that cable cut."

Brother-in-law reached the open door and grabbed the axe hanging inside. Suddenly a huge rush of water was heard, and as the three looked forward, the Boston's bow section began to suddenly rise from the depth almost as if she were bobbing on a string. The odor was suddenly much stronger, and the Boston's bottom was moving toward the Mary E.

As the Boston rose like a great breaching whale to the surface, Jack realized she was coming off the sandbar and toward his boat. He also remembered his boat was still secured to the bottom by the cable to the sunken rigging, and the boat engines weren't up to steam

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power. "Get that line cut, now!" he yelled down to the two men on the front deck.

Brother-in-law was soon joined by Billy, who grabbed the damaged axe, and together the two men started chopping on the cable that ran over the bow and down into the river. The two men watched out of the corners of their eyes; they'd never seen anything like the boat rising from the depths as if she were coming alive again. Chop. Chop. Chop. The axes repeatedly slammed into the heavy metal cable. Strands of cable wire began un-spiraling with a sound that made one think of breaking strings on a banjo—but the sound was much louder as they sprang apart while being chopped away. The Boston had rolled over once and was now rolling toward the stationary boat.

Jack yelled down, "Cut the cable! Cut the damn cable or we're done for!"

The Boston was still rolling, but she was in deeper water now. The top section of the steamer rolled out of sight into the water, and Jack could see the second and third decks had been completely crushed. As the starboard side came into view, he could see the doorway where the two men had entered earlier. A great wave of water gushed out of the Boston as she continued to roll. The boat was crushing its upper decks under its own weight, but still, she seemed to have buoyancy about her. That made no sense. What could be keeping her from sinking into the deeper river?

Jack could see that the steamer was going to crash into his boat. As he grabbed the pilot wheel, he yelled down to the two men on the lower deck, "Get outta there! She's a comin' into us!"

The steamer's bottom came toward the bow, and as it did, it rolled under the shallow draft bow of the Mary E. The two men on the deck were knocked off their feet by a wave of water as the bottom section of the Boston came in hard contact with the Mary E's bow keel. A scraping sound from below deck could be heard as the Boston rolled under the center keel, and the Mary E began to slowly rise up from the water.

The Boston slid under the front half of the Mary E, and once again the sunken boat began its rise toward the surface. Something inside kept lifting her and not letting the bow section sink to the bottom. The problem was she now began to lift the Mary E with her mysterious rise to the surface. Jack could hear the cargo shifting and the heavy growling sound of the Boston dragging under the keel as he held onto the pilot wheel to keep from falling.

Down on deck Billy could see the cable pulling tight against the damaged deck keel. He knew they had to try and cut the few final strands of the cable and untangle the two boats. He knew the Boston could pull the bow section down by her heavy weight if still attached to the Mary E when she sunk down into the deeper water. He managed to get to his feet and began making his way to the last few straining strands of cable. The deck was about five or six feet out of the water by now. Jack looked to the back of the boat and

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could see the water starting to come over the stern and coming along the deck toward the engine room. He watched helplessly as all he could do was hold onto the wheel.

Billy finally managed to get to the damaged kevel with the cable tangled around it, and with a mighty final swing, he brought the blade of the axe down on the cable. The cable severed and began to disappear over the side along with the port deck kevel. At the second the cable let loose, he saw a spark, then a blinding flash, and his ears went deaf.

It felt like the Mary E was lifted into the air, surrounded by towers of water, flames, and wooden debris from the Boston. Below the water, it was aglow as if the gates of Hell had opened and unleashed a terrible fire and brimstone below the boat. The fire's heat that filled the air was tempered by the tons of water flying around the boat.

For a fraction of a second, the boat seemed to hold suspended on the great eruption of water and flames. Then, as suddenly as she rose up, the Mary E settled back to the river with a terrible shudder. The only sounds were of the water returning to the surface of the river and splintered wooden boards raining down on the decks of the Mary E.

In a few seconds everything was quiet. Jack pulled himself up by the wheel and shook his head to clear the calamity from his thoughts. "What the Hell!"

He quickly turned and looked toward the stern and then toward the bow. Miraculously, his boat looked to be intact, but where were Billy and Brother-in-law? He ran out on the corner of the wheelhouse and looked down onto the damaged deck below him. There, lying still, were the two men. After a moment they both began to move and look around to try and figure out what had just happened.

“You two okay?” Jack called to them, as they were struggled to sit up.

Brother-in-law held his hand up indicating he was okay. Billy shook his head to clear the water from his ear so he could hear. After a few more seconds he called out, “Yeah, I’m okay. What happened?” He looked around for a second, “Where’s the boy?” Billy made his way to his feet and grabbed the handrail to steady himself for a moment before going toward the stern.

By now Brother-in-law was up and had walked to the front railing to look at the river. There before him lay the front half of the Boston—in thousands of pieces. He couldn’t believe his eyes. Below the water’s surface, billions of bubbles raced to the surface to escape into the air.

From below came the voice of Billy. “Jack, he’s okay. Shook up, but okay. The dog too. What happened?”

They all knew there was an explosion, but an explosion like none of them had ever heard or seen before. It came from below the water’s surface. It was as if the Boston herself had exploded with

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tremendous force. There was no way her boilers could have been the source. She'd been under water for hours. No fire from black powder could survive under water to cause such an explosion.

Billy looked up at Jack as the dog and the boy walked over to where Brother-in-law was standing and looked out onto the open river at the spectacle before them. "I saw a spark for a second right before the explosion, but there was nothin' to explode."

Brother-in-law turned and said, "Maybe it was the bottom gas that exploded. Heard tell o' swamp gas explodin' one time. Maybe that's what this was. Swamp gas."

Billy quickly answered. "No, swamp gas has a foul odor like the smell of sulfur in the air after a cannon fire or gun. No, it wasn't swamp gas. Not the boiler. Not gun powder. Nothin' like that. Somethin' different. It was as if the Boston herself exploded from within."

By now the Mary E was beginning to drift with the debris field on the river. Jack wanted to get underway and as far from this mess as soon as possible. "Billy, you and the boy get below and signal me when pressure's up, and we can move on our own power. Brother-in-law, go astern and look over the paddle section. Make sure she's not damaged or any o' the debris is caught up in the bucket boards."

All three disappeared from the front deck. The big yeller dog stood for a moment with his tail wagging, looking toward where the three men had just left. Then, with a sudden burst of energy, he took off in search of the boy.

Jack looked down at his hands; most of the bleeding had stopped. He removed the bloody bandages and examined the wounds. They were bad, but he'd experienced worse. The whistle on the talk tube gave out a sharp chirp. Jack pulled the plug and hollered down, "Billy, what's she look like?"

"We've only got ninety pounds o' pressure. If you try an' move 'er too much she'll use the steam with little movement. Give me half an hour and you can get underway."

Jack asked, "Can I maneuver out in the channel to get away from the debris and off the shallow bottom?"

There was a moment's pause and no answer. "Billy! Did you hear me?" Jack called again.

"Yeah, but just get 'er into the channel and straight with the current," came the response.

Jack looked out the side toward the stern to see Brother-in-law. He could see him and the dog near the paddle assembly. Jack sounded the boat whistle to get his attention. He turned and gave Jack the high sign, indicating all was well.

Jack moved the engine room telegraph to the 'SLOW' position and was answered from below. He felt the paddles engage, and he breathed a sigh of relief as his boat slowly moved toward the safety of the main channel and away from the wreckage of the Boston. He did as Billy suggested and only moved his boat to a safer position midstream as he waited for the steam to come up to operating pressure.

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Jack tied the wheel center and went to see Billy in the engine room. "Any damage t' the engine or boiler?" Jack asked as he stepped into the hot steam-filled room.

"We got some water, not sure if it's a bottom leak or if it came in when we swamped the stern." Jack could see the boy struggling to operate the bilge pump used to remove the water from the boat's bottom section. Jack and Billy watched him for a moment. "Kid's got the stuff; he ain't scared. I can't say as much for me, at least for a few minutes out there on that deck. Why didn't the explosion break our back and put us on the bottom?" Billy asked as they stood looking at the boy working the pump.

Jack hesitated for a moment before answering. "Whoever built this boat run three keel sections along 'er bottom. The backbone keel is extra heavy and its outside section runs deeper in the water giving the flatter bottom more stability when she turns or maneuvers in shallow water. Plus they added, alongside the main keel, two additional support keels on each side for extra bottom strength. They must've figured she was gonna carry heavy weight or run the river in the winter ice or make runs when the river ran shallow. Either way, it probably saved our bacon today. That special construction of her bottom is why I could salvage her from the cornfield in the first place. When I looked inside her lyin' against the trees I figured she'd be broke in half by the flood waters pushin' her against those trees. But those special heavy timbers gave her more strength than any boat I've ever been on."

Jack thought back to the boat as he'd found her. After he made the deal with old man Pendergrass, he'd dug four deep trenches under the Mary E and filled them with heavy flat-cut timbers. He greased them to help the boat slide when he was ready. Next he begged, borrowed and, some even said stole, heavy ropes to lash around the boat. In the four trenches he pulled rope under the bottom of the boat, brought them up on the port side, and tied them to the deck kevels. He even greased the two big trees the boat was leaning on.

He dug the ground out where the midship rudders and stern rudder would most likely slide down and come to rest. Next, he dug a deep hole where the paddles would come down. It took him and Billy almost two weeks to get down to proper level. The last couple of feet were difficult to remove because the ground water kept filling the hole, and they had to scoop the muddy earth and water out with buckets to finish the hole.

He measured and remeasured to make sure the rudders and paddle wouldn't come in contact with the ground and become damaged. Be no way he could fix something like that with just him and Billy in a cornfield.

The final things he needed were the two sets of Pendergrass's heavy work horses, and he managed to get two more teams to help pull when the time came. Early on a Saturday morning, while things were still wet with dew, he rigged the four teams up to the ropes he'd placed around the boat and was ready to pull.

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He let Pendergrass give the command to pull, figured it made the old man feel good, sort of like he was in charge of the operation. For a moment it didn't appear the horses were going to be able to pull the eighty-foot boat off its resting place. They pulled and strained to nearly breaking point of the harness, and then someone noticed the trees begin to shake behind the boat. All at once, without hesitation, the boat slid down the trees and onto the greased timbers with a thunderous thud as it came to rest. After all that work it came to rest almost as perfectly as Jack had hoped. He crawled under the boat to check the rudders and paddle assembly. They were undamaged. His preparations to remove the earth below them had worked.

Last, he buried two large locust posts off to her starboard side to secure the boat for when she went to floating upright. The river, when it came up, would bring water pressure straight against the starboard side. If the Mary E weren't tied off, she'd end up right back where she started, up against the trees.

Jack and Billy planned and re-planned most every day for seven months. Then came the rains they hoped for, and the river started to rise. When she went to floating, Billy fired the boiler for the first time. Jack had placed small poles in the field at different points to know the depth of the water and the way to the clear channel in the river.

The flood waters came, and she was lifted just like he'd hoped. When she was floating free and the wooden poles he'd placed in the field disappeared below the rising muddy water, Jack signaled to Billy

to move "FORWARD SLOW" on the engines. He could feel the connecting arm move for the first time. Slowly the boat moved away from the trees that had imprisoned her for the past months. She soon put strain on the two ropes that held her broadside to the river's current. Jack and Billy had brought Brother-in-law on board for just one special job that day. As Jack moved the Mary E, she put strain on the mooring lines. She was no longer being held in place as much as being hindered in her journey back to the main channel. When Jack knew all was well with the paddles and rudders, and with the engine working properly, he knew it was time to cut her free. He called down to Brother-in-law to cut the stern rope first. As her paddle held after the first rope was cut, Jack signaled to cut the bow line. He rang down to Billy to add more steam to drive the engine. The Mary E began moving slowly out into the muddy Ohio River where she was at home once again on the open waters. Jack's dream had finally come true. He could see, on the bank behind him, a crowd of people who had gathered to watch this remarkable event happen. A cheer went up as she moved across the sunken cornfield and back into the river. Jack had waited months for what he did next. He pulled the whistle rope of the Mary E for the first time. The steam whistle echoed off the hills surrounding the valley. It was sweet music to his ears.

Chapter 5

Wheeling

Jack and Billy made a quick inspection of the engine room to make sure there were no problems. The water in the bottom of the boat began to disappear as the boy's pumping pushed it back into the river.

"That's good enough son, a little water's a good thing for the bottom of a boat. Keeps the wood a little wet and swelled up." The boy quit pumping and looked at his hands. A couple large blisters had formed in his small palms, and because he'd continued pumping after they formed, they'd opened to the air.

Billy gently took hold of the boy's hands in his and looked them over, "You're not used to hard work, are you son? Them's gonna be sore in the mornin'. Come over here." He opened a small locker on the wall and inside were odds and ends of stuff. One of the small bottles had a red liquid inside. "This's gonna hurt, but it'll help them blisters to heal." The bottle label read: 'Tincture of Iodine.' The boy didn't move his hands as Billy poured a small amount on each blister, but he clenched his teeth and closed his eyes hard to bear the burning. Billy said, "Blow on 'em to blow away the pain." The boy blew like he was trying to extinguish birthday candles.

Billy rubbed the boy's shaggy brown hair and saw a tear run down his cheek. He didn't let on that he saw the tear, but he said,

"Them blisters hurts like hell even for the best o' men. All right son, ya know, I been meanin' to tell ya that's one fine dog ya have there. You wanna tell me what that fine dog's name is?"

The boy hesitated for a moment. "It's Sunny," he said.

"Sunny? That's a fine name for a big yellor dog. Must be 'cause he's the color o' the sun. Now what's the dog's owner's name?" The boy looked confused at how the question was asked, so Billy pointed his finger at the boy and asked, "What's your name?" The boy hesitated and looked down toward the deck below his feet. Billy placed his big hand under the boy's chin and lifted it up toward him. "Come on. What's your name, son?"

"Joshua," he said with a smile.

Billy grinned big. "Well, Joshua, you better go find your dog. Iffin' you don't watch out, that brother-in-law o' mine's liable to lay claim to a fine dog like that." The boy smiled and went out the door onto the deck in search of his companion, still occasionally blowing on his hands.

The chirp of the talk tube's whistle sharply pierced the steam-filled air. "Billy, what's the pressure? We ready to go?" Jack was impatient to get underway.

Billy took a dirty rag and wiped the face of the copper gauge to see the pressure. He squinted his eye to make out the numbers in the dim light. "One hundred and forty-five pounds!" He gave the bellows a couple quick pumps, sending blasts of air into the firebox

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and could hear the flames increase as they were being fed fresh oxygen.

Jack, still impatient, yelled into the tube again. "Billy, can I move the boat? She's a driftin' toward the far bank."

Billy glanced toward the starboard side and could see Jack was right. He called up to Jack, "She's up t' steam."

The sound of the telegraph's bell from the pilothouse signaled to move forward. Billy engaged the steam valve and engaged the big clutch drive. The Mary E began to move toward the city of Wheeling. Billy pumped the bellows a couple more times to feed the fire before opening the door. The heat rushed out as Billy threw on more coal to the firebox. The coals glowed red on Billy's tanned skin. He pushed the door shut and made a few more adjustments to the air damper. A quick look again at the steam gauge. One forty-seven. *She's good for now*, he thought to himself. Billy wiped the sweat from his face and went on deck to see Brother-in-law and his new friend.

Jack had hoped to make Wheeling by nightfall. He'd had enough adventure for one day. Just past Moundsville, they met the steamer Rockington heading south at full steam. She was a large salvager with a big jib crane and rigging on the front of her deck. Two massive pole arms that were connected to her deck on the starboard side and port side formed the heavy lift rigging. They extended nearly sixty feet out over the bow at which point they came together. Three large pulley wheels were between the two ends of the lifting boom. Large

cables wrapped over the three to feed down to a hook that was attached to the ends of cables. The cables fed back to a large steam-powered winch mounted on the main deck. The Rockington was made to lift big loads.

Along the port side, men in suits and fancy top hats watched as the Mary E passed going north. *Those people aboard the Rockington have to know we saw the Boston*, Jack figured. Those fellows had to be chasing floating debris somewhere downriver. The last time Jack saw the stern section of the Boston she was still walking far downriver toward the big turn. He thought to himself, *If she makes it to the turn in the river, no one will find her in that deep place.* That was fine with Jack. He had no hankering to get involved with insurance people.

Billy and Brother-in-law were below deck feeding the boilers to make full speed to Wheeling. On calm water with a full head of steam, the Mary E was doing just what she was designed for—making good time. Jack could see the lights of Wheeling, and the suspension bridge that crossed the river was just coming into view. The lights of the city twinkled on the smooth water leading toward the town. He rang the telegraph for ‘SLOW’ on the paddle. The two men below had stepped out on the deck for some cool air and could see the city coming nearer. Down on the front deck, Joshua sat on a coil of rope and rubbed his dog’s head. Billy stepped inside and closed the dampers and turned the steam valve near closed. The Mary E and her crew began to slow as she approached the town.

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Brother in-law was going to see his wife tonight. Jack and Billy were going to get home-cooked meals, baths, and real beds to sleep in tonight, luxuries neither of them experienced very often. Being bachelors, there wasn't any need for personal amenities on the river. Regular bathing and clean clothes were only important when they came to town. To their new young friend and his dog, it seemed to make no nevermind one way or another. They sat and enjoyed the lights of the big city that were dancing on the water.

Jack knew the manager at the Wheeling wharf, but he didn't want him or anyone else to know Brother-in-law was back in town. He realized the manager most likely was on the docks when Brother-in-law signed on to replace the sick crew member and might remember that. Jack wanted to keep his information close and didn't want to reveal what he knew or that Brother-in-law was alive. After all, the four on the boat were the only ones to know the story of the events of the Boston and her whereabouts.

"Brother-in-law?" Jack called over the side. From under the deck's roof he stepped out to look at Jack. "Tell Billy we're gonna hold steady here in midstream, whiles you and the boy cover our cargo from pryin' eyes."

Jack rang 'DEAD SLOW' down to Billy. He slowed the engine until the steam venting from the valves released only every ten or fifteen seconds and went out to help move things under cover on the cargo deck.

After a few minutes Brother-in-law stepped to where he could see Jack in the wheelhouse. "Hey, Jack, we got the salvage covered. No one's gonna know what we're carryin'."

Jack leaned over to look down on Brother-in-law standing below him. "Where's Billy? Tell him we're gonna put our bow in just south of the creek. You and the boy go ashore there. Don't want people to see you."

By then Billy had stepped to where Jack could see him. "Billy we're gonna put them ashore over there." He pointed toward the south side of the creek. "Then we'll take 'er up to the wharf and tie off for the night and then join 'em at his home." Billy threw up a hand to indicate he understood.

Jack rang up a little more speed as he turned the bow toward the shore just south of Wheeling creek. It was a little steep there, but the bottom should be deeper on the south side. The Mary E made almost no sound as she moved slowly toward shore. At that point, the rhythmic venting of steam was her loudest noise. Jack blew into the talk tube to get Billy's attention below. "I'll ring 'DEAD SLOW' and then 'REVERSE' for a few seconds, then go to 'NEUTRAL.'"

Billy pulled the bell in acknowledgement. The boat eased closer and closer. At just the right moment, Jack rang 'DEAD SLOW.' After nearly a minute, he rang 'REVERSE.' Billy pulled the clutch lever and waited for rotation to stop. In just a few seconds, he pushed her into reverse and then pulled the lever into the idle position. The few revolutions of the paddle in reverse greatly slowed

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the boat's forward speed. In the darkness, the Mary E drifted smoothly into the soft mud of the bank and came to a stop as gentle as any pilot ever beached his boat.

"Brother-in-law?" Jack called softly down from the bridge. Out on the front deck, he and the boy quickly appeared. "Don't talk to anyone. Go straight to your house, and Billy and me will be along by mornin'." Brother-in-law acknowledged with a wave. The two took a short run and jumped far over onto the riverbank. Sunny, the dog, quickly followed the boy onto the shore and up the steep bank.

Jack stepped out into the night on the backside of the bridge for a moment to accustom his eyes to the darkness across the water. He carefully looked up and down the river to make sure no other boats were in the area. The reflections of lights from the homes along the river were the only things he saw on the water that night. The Mary E was running with no lights on her bow or stern that would give away her position to other boats. That night Jack didn't want to reveal his position to boat nor man. He stepped back inside the wheelhouse and rang down to the engine room, 'DEAD SLOW ASTERN.' Billy heard the bells and engaged the engine. The motionless paddles began rotating back toward the calm of the darkened river.

The boat moved almost silently out into the main channel, and Jack moved the wheel to position the rudders so they'd turn the stern toward the south. He moved the bridge telegraph into position that gave bells 'SLOW FOWARD' below. Jack wanted to stay out in the

channel and take a look-see at the wharf just below the bridge. He could tell even from a distance in the dark that someone was moving around the docks. The Mary E seemed to know the serious nature of her travel that dark evening. The slowly turning paddles were quieter than normal as they slipped in and out of the water. The night air didn't carry sound as it usually does. Sounds travels easily on the water most nights. There'd been times when Jack had stood on one side of the river and heard men's voices talking while fishing near a fire on the far bank. He couldn't recognize of what they spoke, but the sounds of their words traveled over the glass-smooth water of the night.

As Jack neared the dock, he took out his telescope and looked toward the dimly lit dock. Men in suits and fancy city hats—insurance people were waiting there. *Must be 'cause o' the missin' boat.* Jack kept the boat heading north, steering with only the flickering shore lights as his guide. As he passed under the bridge he decided to go north to the end of the island on his left and turn into the back channel. He knew of an old friend's dock on the far side that would welcome his unnoticed arrival that night.

Jack was running the risk of putting his boat aground in the narrow backwater channel. The flow and depth of water changed with each rise and fall of the main river. Hidden sandbars and sunken trees often made the back channel their home below the water's surface. Jack wished he had Brother-in-law here to gauge the depth in front of the bow. A weight on a measured rope thrown

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over the bow into the water ahead of a boat could give some indication of the water's depth. In the dark and with no guidance for water depth, Jack rang 'DEAD SLOW' to Billy below and sent a prayer to Him above.

After awhile he began to see where the back channel rejoined the main river a couple hundred yards ahead. He rang down 'ALL STOP.' He stepped out onto the side bridge and strained to see the mooring posts near the banks of the island dock. He could make out their location just ahead on the left. The boat was now being carried mostly by only the river's slow current. Jack blew the whistle on the speaking tube and Billy quickly answered. "Billy, come on deck and make fast a bow line as we drift into the dock."

In a moment, Jack saw Billy come out onto the deck below. He picked up a coil of line and stood near the edge waiting to jump at just the last second before the boat touched the dock. He timed it just right in the darkness and jumped as the boat hit the heavy wooden post making a deep thumping sound. Billy nearly fell as he labored to pull the line with him, but he landed on the dark dock. He'd already wrapped the heavy line around the starboard front keel. The Boston had ripped the port keel off earlier that day. The boat's forward motion brought tight the line with the sound of stretching. Billy quickly went to the third keel, back on the port side, and tied the boat off with a second line. The Mary E was secure for the night.

Jack strained to see inside the dark wheelhouse before leaving the bridge, and over in the corner, he could just barely make out the wooden box Billy had recovered earlier that day. He'd nearly forgotten about the small box full of supposed treasure in the busy day that was now behind him. Without benefit of a mirror, Jack ran his hands alongside his head and flattened his dark hair to look as if a fine comb had been run through it. He grabbed his captain's hat that hung within reach just inside the door, and placed it on his head. He looked at the window glass, but the darkness hid his reflection. He was confident, by the feel of it, that the hat sat just right on his head. He leaned down and picked up the box. The sound inside was definitely metal coins, and the box was definitely heavy. It would be a long way to carry the small heavy wooden box to where Brother-in-law's house was located on the far side of the river.

Billy was inside the boiler room pulling ashes and securing the engine before leaving her in the back channel. "Billy, how's it goin'?" Jack asked as he stepped in the room.

"I got 'er about set for the night." Billy went to the wall and picked up a lantern. He reached onto a shelf and picked up a match, then he struck it along the side of the lantern and handed it toward Jack. "How 'bout goin' back to the paddle and make sure we didn't pick anythin' up as we came through the brush pile near the upper end. I don't like leavin' 'er stern to the current this way. Anythin' floats downstream'll end up in the paddles. Can you check back there while I finish pullin' these hot coals from the firebox? Oh

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yeah, Brother-in-law opened a box o' cigars and left 'em on the back bulkhead wall; grab a couple on your way back."

Jack took the lit lantern and lowered the glass. He looked at the wick and made an adjustment to increase the light before stepping out into the darkness. He held the lantern high to shield the direct light from his eyes to avoid being blinded in the dark. He looked toward the stern and stepped over a coil of rope as he carefully moved along the side in the near dark.

The Mary E had a narrow walkway along both sides of the paddle wheel. Jack eased his way along the port side, holding the lantern up to see if any boards had been damaged. It appeared that all the boards that were above the water were intact. He then made his way to the starboard side, and as he did he could see a tree limb wedged between the stern and the paddle. It didn't appear to be a problem for now, but Jack wanted it cleared before he put the boat in reverse the next time, or the rotating wheel could pull in the limb and damage a board.

He continued to the back and looked at the bucket boards on the paddle. One paddle had a large piece missing from part of the board. It shouldn't be a problem unless it broke completely, and Jack hoped to fix it before heading downriver.

As Jack made his way back onto the main deck, Billy unexpectedly came around the corner. "Damn, Billy! You scared the shit outta me comin' outta the dark like that."

Billy grinned as he reached down near the back wall and opened the box of cigars. He grabbed a handful. "Here Jack. Have one of these fine Wheelin' cigars. Calm your nerves. You look like you need it." Billy raised his nose to smell the night air in the back channel and sucked in a whiff of something foul. "Whew, Jack! Ya smell that? Smells like them privies from over there behind those fancy homes on the riverbank must be drainin' into the river right here."

Jack lifted the lantern glass and held it so Billy could light his cigar, and then Jack lit his. He lowered the glass and the two of them drew a couple big lungs full of smoke and blew it out into the night air. "Yes sir, one o' the very finest cigars around, and good fer gettin' rid o' the bugs and hidin' them smells from privies." They both laughed as they moved around to the side of the boat and made their way forward.

Near the front of the boat, at the bottom of the steps, Jack handed Billy the lantern and picked up the wooden box. The sound of money moving inside the box made both men smile. "Jack, we're gonna be rich, rich, rich!"

Jack said, "Yeah, but rich is heavy. Grab a box o' cigars and some o' that fancy French perfume from the Boston. I know someone who enjoys a good cigar and likes t' smell real good."

Billy had a puzzled look on his face as he reached under the canvas tarp and pulled out a box of cigars and a couple fine glass

bottles that came all the way from France. He slid the bottles in his pocket and put the box of cigars under his arm.

The two men moved along the deck until they could step over onto the dock and then found their way to a crude set of steps leading to the top of the bank. As they reached the top, the lights from nearby homes made it bright enough to see without the lantern. "Billy, blow that thing out and set it in the weeds over there. We'll pick it up when we come back."

Billy walked over to the horseweeds and pushed them aside, held the lantern up, and blew out the yellow flame. It went dark. After a few seconds their eyes adjusted and they could see pretty well as they made their way to the big house that was all lit up nearby.

In a hushed tone Billy called to Jack, "Jack, you're not goin' t' Miss Tilley's, are you? We got a long way t' go t' Brother-in-law's, and your urges will have to wait."

Jack stopped and looked up the long street toward the center of the island to see if anyone was about. "Not payin' a social visit. I decided we're not goin' t' Brother-in-law's tonight. Most likely we'll be a couple of the few people out on the street. Tilley runs a boardin' house, and we need a room till mornin'. We'll be all fresh before we make our way into town when more people're stirrin' about. We can blend in better, no suspicion that way. Besides, we're usin' her docks and she'll need payment." Jack pointed toward the box of cigars under Billy's arm.

“Jack, this ain’t your run-of-the-mill boardin’ house. She may have customers. It might just not be a good time for us to go bustin’ in.”

“You did leave a tip the last time we were here, didn’t you?” Jack looked at Billy with a questioning expression. “Come on, let’s go.” The two men walked over the neatly manicured yard and opened the wrought iron gate. The gate screeched as it swung open.

“Why don’t she fix the damn gate? It’s as bad as it was the last time we were here!” Billy remarked.

“She don’t want the squeak taken outta that gate. When that gate squeaks, she can check t’ see if a customer’s comin’ or if the local constable’s payin’ a visit,” Jack said as he shifted the box from one side to the other.

Billy looked at the side of Jack’s shirt and saw a brownish stain where he’d been carrying the treasure box against his side. “Jack, what’s that on your shirt? Must be comin’ from that box o’ money.”

Jack looked down and saw the stain and held the box out so he could see what Billy was talking about. The light escaping from the house was bright enough that he could see a brown substance oozing out along the bottom boards.

“Don’t know. We’ll find out inside.”

A curtain moved at the window behind the porch swing. Jack saw it and knew the owner of the house was aware they were coming. The door opened and the bright light from inside spilled down the steps.

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"You old river rat! Some said you were dead! Others said they wished you were dead! But here you are, and ya brought that sweet Billy feller with you again. Ain't got no special tonight Billy. That Chinese gal moved on to Cincinnati. Said she had kinfolk there." Billy looked a little embarrassed at the big lady's comment.

"Tilley, you're still as pretty as ever," Jack said with a smile as he topped the steps to the house. The house was built high on a cut-stone foundation, one of the big old Victorian homes that brought beauty to the lower end of the island. The grand old home was originally built by a steamboat captain who made his living on the river. He built the house to be above the flood water that sometimes covered the island. He wanted a nice home near the water for those few times each year when he came upriver. The captain built the docks on the backside so he'd be able to bring his steamer into the back channel from the south. It was deep water back then, and he could bring the big steamer the last hundred yards into the back channel up to his private dock, where the steamer's stern wasn't far from the main river when tied to the docks. When time came to put back out on the river, he could ease her out into the main channel and head her north or south.

Then in 1873, just south of Hannibal on the Mississippi, his steamer named Missouri blew her main boiler and the captain was badly burned by steam. He died a week later. The house stood empty for two years until his family who lived in Muskingum City decided to sell it. That spring the flood waters got higher than

anyone had ever seen, and the bottom floor of the grand house was filled with water and mud. After that no one wanted to buy the place for fear of future floods.

That same year, they say, Miss Tilley was asked by those in proper places to leave Pittsburgh after some questions regarding her business activities were raised. She and a couple of her employees came south to Wheeling in search of the riverboat captain who used to visit while in Pittsburgh.

Tilley was upset to learn of the death of her old friend but came upon the idea of buying his damaged house. After an all-night negotiation session with one of the local bankers, the deal was sealed. The lower end of the island was out of the main part of town and gave clients a little privacy when coming to visit. And best of all, no churches or meeting houses were anywhere nearby. Those two establishments had caused her business problems in the past. She guessed churches and Sunday meeting people didn't like fancy boarding houses.

So the bank made the deal and a new business was opened on Wheeling Island. It was a time when many new businesses came to town. Steel, tobacco, banking, glass, leather, pottery, and all the small businesses that supported those major industries sprang up around town. Well, Miss Tilley saw her business as one supporting the local entertainment of gentlemen, and that's what she told some of those fine gentlemen who spread the word on Sunday morning. That is,

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after the private prayer meeting was held at Tilley's place Saturday night.

"You fellers need a bath, some dinner, and," Tilley leaned over to Billy kinda smug-like, "we'll see if we can't find somethin' special for you after all." She elbowed him in the ribs.

Billy's face turned red as he said, "Thanks Tilley, but we ain't here for that."

She just laughed. "What's in the box Jack, gold or somethin'?" Tilley asked Jack as she led him to the back where the bathing rooms were.

"Don't know for sure, got it off a wreck downriver this mornin'."

Tilley's face changed as she stepped back from the two men she was just keepin' friendly company with. "Ain't off the Miss Boston, is it?"

The look on their faces gave her an answer before Jack could respond.

"They say she had the fever aboard; all the crew went crazy with the fever, run 'er aground, and blew 'er up!" Tilley was dead serious.

Miss Tilley was a big woman, pretty in the face, even under the paint she wore. She'd made her way in the world since she ran away from home in the Pennsylvania oil fields to find fame and fortune in the big city. Under all that paint and fancy French clothes was a woman you didn't want to mess with. "You feller's best be movin' on. Don't need the fever here."

Jack was caught off guard at the sudden change in his old friend. "Wait Tilley, that ain't how it happened."

Her brow lowered and she had the look of a big cat getting ready to pounce. "You better start talkin' and talk fast. I ain't heard nothin' that's gonna stop me callin' my boys to toss you out the front door—friends or no friends."

Tilley was referring to the two men in her employment who made sure customers were proper in their behavior and paid what was due the house. Anyone who hurt or tried to cheat a lady out of her due payment was taken out the back door and thrown over the bank into the river channel below. Jack had no desire to go swimming tonight.

"Listen, Tilley, there ain't no fever," Jack half pleaded to the woman who'd reached for the call rope to beckon the bouncers.

"I'm listening."

"Billy's brother-in-law was on the Boston when she went t' ground. Signed on when a feller in the crew got sick over on the city wharf yesterday. The guy told Brother-in-law that he'd ate rhubarb pie with leaves in it. That made him deathly sick. It was the captain and a crewman that started sayin' he had the fever or plague or somethin' like that. Brother-in-law signed on to replace the sick crewman and below Moundsville the crew mutinied and left the captain and Brother-in-law aboard. Fires went cold and the Boston couldn't keep power to maneuver in the river, and she run aground. Captain abandoned his boat, not wantin' to lose his license. Brother-in-law come south on a towboat and found me and Billy. We come

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north to the wrecked boat, and she was already rollin' into deeper water when we went aboard to salvage her. She broke up and rolled under my boat. Then the damndest thing happened. The front half o' the boat exploded while underwater, raisin' up the Mary E. We come north t' try and find out what she was a carryin'."

Tilley wasn't completely convinced, "Where's that Brother-in-law? He sick, or dead, or what?"

"No, we put him and a boy we found on board ashore below the creek, so no one would know he's back till we figure out what happened." Jack, after being caught off guard at first, was now on his best offense.

Tilley lowered her arm and just stared at the two for a moment. Her eyes went down to the box Jack was holding. "What's in there?" she asked as she pointed her finger at the box.

"Don't know," Jack said as he shook the box. "Billy and Brother-in-law says it's treasure. Gold coins. I don't know. But if you give me a hammer and somethin' t' pry it open with, we can all find out."

Tilley's fears were not quite gone, but she was curious about the sound in the box too. "Well, let's see what's in the damn thing," she said as she disappeared into a small room off the kitchen. She quickly returned with a hammer and a small pry bar. Jack set the box on its side in the middle of the floor and began to hammer and pry on the top of the box. It was remarkably hard to remove the nails that secured the edges down. Billy was holding the box while Jack

worked the tool to lift the lid. Tilley sat down Indian-style with her fancy dress puffed up around her, watching the show. By now, a couple of the ladies had come into the room to find out what the mystery of the box was. There was an air of fun and suspense to the event taking place in the middle of the kitchen floor. After some doing, the lid was pulled free and the inside contents rolled onto the kitchen floor. Everyone was stunned at what they found inside the wooden box.

Chapter 6

The Nail City

The room went quiet for a moment as everyone stared at what had spilled out of the box. It was clear now what had oozed out earlier and stained the side of Jack's shirt. Tilley was the first to break into a big belly laugh. The ladies quickly joined in, laughing almost uncontrollably. Jack looked at Billy, "Treasure?" Billy reached down and picked up one of the treasure pieces for a closer look.

Tilley rolled backward and exposed her lady's undergarments to the world as she laughed until tears rolled from her eyes. The tears caused her makeup to run, and she looked something like a big red-headed raccoon. In between bouts of laughter, Tilley burst out, "You boys sure nailed that treasure!" With that she continued to laugh.

On the floor spilling from the box were... Nails. Lots of nails. Big ones, small ones, and medium-sized ones. They'd begun to rust after being exposed to the river water. The moisture and heat inside the box started the oxidation process, and the nails were rusting.

Jack sat back on the floor in disbelief for a moment. Then he looked at Billy, and they both burst into laughter. "Billy, if you want to build an empire, looks like you'll have the nails to get started!" Jack said as the laughter began to subside.

Tilley sat up and rubbed her eyes. This caused her raccoon mask to widen while she caught her breath from the fit of laughter. "You boys've given me the best amusement I've had in a long time."

Jack had stopped laughing and was beginning to look at a couple nails. "Billy, anythin' look different to you about these nails?"

Billy composed himself and picked up a nail to examine it. "It's a nail, Jack, you hold it to a board and take a hammer and drive it in. It's just a damn nail. Not gold coins. Not a treasure. Just a nail."

One of the girls put her arms around Billy's shoulders and whispered in his ear, "Sugar, if you had a few million of them, you could be rich and show me a good time." Billy wasn't sure about the rich part, but the good time part sure did interest him.

Jack was looking at the nails with a curious face. He rolled one of the nails in his fingers and checked it from top to bottom. "Nope, this ain't no nail like I've ever seen before."

Billy turned his attention from the lady wrapped around him and said, "What're you talkin' about?"

Jack held the nail straight out at arm's length between himself and Billy. "Look at it. It's round. Not square like a cut nail, but round, like it's manufactured that way."

"What're you talkin' about?" Billy said as he took the nail. "You're right. It's round. Still, Jack, it's a round nail—not worth anythin' more than a square nail. It's a box o' junk. Give it to Tilley. She may wanna make some shelves someday."

Tilley, having regained her ladylike composure, leaned toward Jack, "Jack, you do know that Wheeling is the nail capital of the world, don't you? Those factories over in south Wheeling and Benwood make barrels of them things every day. Why, many a dollar spent at my fine establishment was earned over in those hot, hell-holes. Trains and steamers transport them all over the world. Jesus, Jack, you gotta get out more."

Jack hesitated for a moment before answering Tilley's question. "Yeah, I know there's a lot of nails made over there, didn't know it's the world capital o' nails, but this one's different. Nails come outta the machines square-cut with caps on 'em. But these are smooth, and the cap and point are cut the same on each one. That captain had these hid in his room. Somethin' 'bout 'em that he didn't want people to know."

Rose, the lady with her arms still around Billy's neck, blurted out, "Maybe he's a secret nail collector. I heard of a guy collectin' bottles and another feller stamps. Maybe this guy was into nails. Ain't no weirder than them other two fellers."

Billy set the box back upright and as he did he saw something in the bottom of the box. "Jack, I think there's a piece o' paper in the bottom, under the nails."

Jack poured the full contents onto the floor. Nails, more rusty water, and a stained wet piece of paper spilled out onto the floor.

"Jack, you're gonna clean this mess up on my kitchen floor. Cleanin' lady doesn't come but only on Tuesdays and Fridays. Well,

sometimes on Monday if it's been a busy weekend." The three ladies laughed, "And we have lotsa them, don't we girls?" The laughter continued.

The wet paper was very fragile and deeply stained by the rusty water that had been inside the box. Jack carefully lay it on his pant leg and squeezed it between the palm of his hand and his pants' material to gently soak water out of the paper.

"Jack, that ain't gonna come outta them pants or shirt. That Chinese laundry feller's good, but he ain't that good," Tilley told Jack as she rolled to the side and onto her knees to get up off the floor.

Jack stood up and went to the countertop next to the sink and carefully laid the piece of paper down on the smooth surface. "Tilley? You got a choppin' board or somethin' flat an' smooth I could use?"

"Jack this ain't no restaurant, and I ain't got no choppin' board for butcherin' chickens. Up there on the top cupboard shelf is a big servin' platter left here from the captain. That might be what you're needin'. By the way, what're you needin' it for?"

Jack opened the cabinet door and looked toward the top to find the platter.

"There. Up there near the back," Tilley directed Jack's gaze.

"Got it," he said as he retrieved the platter and set it down on the counter next to the piece of paper. Jack laid the paper on the platter and carefully pulled back the first layer. Next he used both hands to grasp the two corners and pulled them together away from the other

side. He laid the paper down and looked at what was written on it. "Berger Brothers Manufacturing," he read. Those were the few words he could make out along the top of the paper. It was the company's letterhead. Some words on the paper were typed, and some were handwritten. But the water and rust stain made it impossible to read anything but a few letters here and there. The paper gave no more clues than before, except for the company's name.

Tilley pushed Jack out of the way as she came up alongside him. "Get outta the way! Sometimes you men couldn't find your ass with both hands! Helpless you are. Let me show you something." She set the platter partially in the sink, with one end at the top of the sink and the other down in. She picked up a pitcher of drinking water and slowly poured it down the paper, gently brushing it with her hand as the water flowed down over it. The water disappearing down the drain was stained yellow and carried some fine dirt and grit along with it.

"Rose, fetch me a couple o' them lemons we got for lemonade today." Rose disappeared down the basement steps and in a minute reappeared with two bright yellow lemons in her hand. Tilley took a small hand towel and very carefully blotted the paper surface. "Jack, get a knife outta that drawer and cut them lemons in half." Jack did like he was told and cut each lemon and laid the halves beside Tilley.

She picked up the first half and squeezed it down over the paper. Its juice was quickly absorbed by the paper. She grabbed a second

one and repeated the task. This time, some of the juice ran off the paper and down the sink. It had a mild yellow color to it. Tilley looked at it for a minute and seemed to be watching for something to happen. "Hand me the salt shaker." Jack again did as he was told. Tilley sprinkled salt over the paper's surface. Next, she took the hand towel and laid it across the platter before saying, "Let that set overnight. We'll see what shows up in the mornin'. Jack, you and Billy need to cleanup and have somethin' to eat. Girls get them baths ready for these boys and, Rose, you let that Billy wash his parts by himself. See if you can find some suitable clothes for these two guests."

Jack lifted the corner of the towel and said, "Tilley where'd you learn to do that?"

Tilley, looking a little humble, answered quietly, "My mother taught me that a long time ago. Dad and my two brothers worked the steel mills over near Johnstown. Their clothes were always stained with dirt, grease, rust, sweat, and sometimes blood. Mama worked her fingers to the bone tryin' t' make them old clothes look clean and decent for the family. They all worked day and night for a few dollars at the mill, tryin' to put food on the table and keep a roof overhead, even if it leaked. They were never, ever gonna get ahead. Mama died tryin' and Pops died missin' her. I wasn't gonna live like that. I guess that's why the good Lord gave me all this beauty." She touched the side of her face and struck a sexy pose. She didn't realize she still wore the raccoon's mask from her smeared make-up.

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“What about your brothers?” Billy asked.

“William still works at the mill. He writes once a year. His wife and him had two kids. He worked and put away money for years so those two kids could go to college. Wanted them to have more than he had. I never met those kids, but I’m proud that some of my kin made good in this world.”

“And your other brother?”

“Not sure. He went to Baltimore hopin’ to work on an ocean-goin’ boat to see the world. That was years ago. Must’ve been a dozen years ago. While I still had my business in Pittsburgh, a package came one Christmas. Had a fancy silk robe from Japan in it. A feller that Sam sailed with had written the letter for him. Sam never learned to read or write, you see. Anyways, it said he hoped to make port on the east coast, and he wanted to come see me and William. That was years ago, and I never heard from him again. I sometimes sit on the porch and watch down the street and hope to see my little brother again someday.” Tilley looked melancholy for a moment. “All right, girls, get these two river rats cleaned up and fed and take them to the back rooms with the clean beds. The windows open in those rooms and they can let in the night air.” Tilley pointed her finger at Rose, “No hanky-panky, young lady.”

Both Rose and Billy looked disappointed. Jack laughed and slapped Billy on the shoulder, “Come on Billy, let’s cleanup and become respectable Wheelin’ gentleman.” They disappeared down the hallway toward the baths.

Tilley's gentlemen's baths were as popular as the ladies' company was. Four rooms along the back wall of the main floor held the spacious baths. Two large glass windows framed by smaller stained-glass windows filtered in the light. The stained-glass window was imported from England at great cost. Each of the narrow framed windows depicted a season of the year. The ceiling had a large rotating fan with open blades to keep the room comfortable for the clients. The wall on each side of the tub had mirrors that stretched from floor to ceiling. The large clawfoot bathtubs were the centerpieces of the rooms. Marble floors made for slippery walking when they became wet. Just inside the main door was another door that opened into the bathroom area. It was small, but it had all the necessities for the job. Under the window, a cabinet doubled as a place to sit and dry off. One could even enjoy the warm sun that came through the afternoon window. Large red satin curtains that were always pulled back hung alongside the window. A few modest customers asked to have the window blinds closed. Because of the bath's elevation and the distance to the far shore, it was guaranteed no eyes could peer into the lavish baths. Still some chose to have the window shades closed. Each room's back wall was done in a different pastel color.

The green room was the first bath along the hallway. The wall was painted green to represent the water in a tranquil pond. Water lotuses and lilies were hand-painted in a design similar to a pond's surface. Small dragonflies appeared to be flying around the white-

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painted flowers. Orange and black Oriental Koi fish swam among the plant's leaves.

The next room was a pale yellow with summer daisies on the wall. Multicolored butterflies were carefully painted to give the appearance of floating above the fields of summer flowers. Four pictures hung in a row, each with a field of sunflowers in the frames.

Bath number three was made in the finest of old Victorian style. Wallpaper with intricate patterns covered the top half of the wall. The bottom half was covered in fine finished oak panels. In the center of the wall was a painting of a lady resting in the afternoon sun. The painter apparently thought she'd be more comfortable in the nude.

Finally, on the far end, was the blue room. The wall was painted to take on the appearance of a summer sky filled with white puffy clouds, and bluebirds soared among the clouds. A picture of a ship with white sails full of wind sailing on a brilliant blue ocean was hung in the center of the wall.

Clients enjoyed the warm water, fragrant bath soaps, and of course the assistance of a lady to help with their baths. Tilley's baths were well known from Cincinnati to Pittsburgh. Hot baths, good service, and discretion were the hallmarks of her business.

Billy chose the blue room, not sure why. Rose opened the cabinet outside the bath and removed two large towels. She opened different bottles of bath salts to find the one she believed would best suit Billy. She giggled as she closed the door. The last Jack heard as

the door closed was, “Oh, Billy.” The door closed leaving the hallway silent.

Jack was not of a mind to choose, so he told the dark-haired lady named Ell to choose the bath. He was only interested in a hot bath and a shave. Jack and Billy seldom had hot baths back home. The river was where they took Saturday night baths a couple times a month. In the river, it was get wet, soap up, rinse off, and get out. No fanciness, just the business of a clean bath in the river.

The dark haired lady was called Ell, short for Eloise. She didn’t remember how or when she started being called Ell. But ever since she was a small kid growing up she was called Ell, not her Christian name. Ell was a lady. She might have been in the occupation most find unladylike, but she was as fine a lady as there ever was. Her face was always bright with a smile. She was only five feet four inches tall in her bare feet. Her skin was darkened as if by the sun. Eyes that shone like sparkling blue sapphires in the morning sun were framed by her dark hair. She wore her hair pulled back from her face, and it was as shiny as a raven’s feathers. The shape of her face and eyes indicated she may be of Native American heritage. But the only home she had known before coming to Tilley’s was in the cold city of Chicago in the Midwest.

She left her home along the lake with hopes of going south to find a warmer climate to call home. It was hard for a single woman to find independence in the late 1800s. Disappointed and running out of money, she ended up in Pittsburgh trying to find work. Tilley

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took her into the boarding house, not as one of her ladies, but as a person looking to find her way. Tilley had a rule for her girls; choose this lifestyle freely and willingly, and never stop being a lady. Once a girl became part of the family, Tilley made sure she had clothes and a room of her own. Not just a room where she entertained, but one that was hers alone. Each girl had money put into an account at the bank for a fund to use as she might later choose—she might use it to start a different lifestyle, or she might use it after growing older so she can just sit on a sunlit porch and relax in style. Tilley made them feel respectable to themselves, which meant a lot to the ladies.

Ell, after a while, made the decision to become part of Tilley's family and earn enough money to eventually make that move to warmer weather, but she hadn't talked about the dream in a long time. Now she was with family and living a life she enjoyed, bringing happiness to men. Some men were looking for nighttime company. Some men were looking for a friendly face to talk to. Some men just wanted somebody they could enjoy a little time with. Ell was comfortable with the men, and they were comfortable with her.

Ell took the towels and laid them on the cabinet under the window. She opened a hidden compartment door in the window bench and sorted through a selection of robes until she found one that would fit Jack. She had an eye to find the right fit. She did this while most men were undressing and slipping into the tub full of sweet-smelling soap suds. She respected they may not wish for her to watch as they undressed.

From behind her, she heard the soft sound of Jack sliding slowly into the tub. When she turned to look, he was sitting back with his eyes closed, enjoying the warm water. Ell moved the small chair next to the side of the tub. She dipped the sponge into the water and squeezed it slowly to let the warm water run down Jack's back. She could see the scars from where hot steel had splashed on his arms. The right side of his chest showed a deep scar he'd carried for many years. She knew that Jack had felt great pain in his life. The scarring on the outside of a man can heal over time. The scars of long ago on the inside sometimes never heal. Ell knew Jack was a good man whose past had damaged his body, and only he knew if his soul had healed with the passing of time.

"Do they hurt?" she asked softly as she ran the warm water over Jack's scarred arms and body.

"Sometimes. Mostly changes in the weather makes 'em hurt. I've almost forgotten the pain that's followed me for so long. But in the night sometimes painful memories return."

She asked no more for the moment, only squeezed the water over his body. Jack's eyes were still closed as he soaked in the comfort of the warm water. He seldom had the chance to enjoy a luxury such as this. Ell moved the sponge over his back to gently wash the soap from his shoulders. As she moved the sponge along his chest on the right side, Jack gave a hushed groan as she touched the deep scar on his chest.

"I'm sorry, Jack. I didn't mean to hurt you. Please forgive me."

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Jack's eyes opened and he looked up at Ell. He raised his hand from the water and placed it on her leg, not in a suggestive way, but as if to comfort her about his pain. "It's all right, Ell. I carry a piece o' bullet from long ago. It hurts sometimes when it's touched. You couldn't have known." He watched as a tear slid down her face. He smiled and wiped it away. As he did Jack took notice of her beauty.

Jack once again closed his eyes and began to tell a story of long ago. "My outfit had chased a confederate raider named John Morgan across Ohio in the summer of 1863. Morgan had nearly thirty-five hundred men with him when he came up from the south and started raidin' west into Indiana, then into the farmland of central Ohio. My outfit, along with others, caught up with him and his men when they tried to cross the river near Buffington Island. During the battle, we drove his men back along the river and captured many of 'em.

"While fightin', I saw a young officer who couldn't have been very much older than I was hangin' from the side of his horse comin' across the river. I knew he was one of the raiders, but he had become tangled in fence wire and was unable to remount his horse. He was callin' for help as the horse ran wildly around in and out of the water while bullets flew all around him. The horse was blind with fear. I couldn't let that confederate officer end up in a fate such as that. I broke my safe position along the bank and waded into the shallows near where the horse was flounderin' about. As I grabbed the reins to try and control the horse, I saw the face of a terrified young officer as he pulled a pistol and fired it at me point blank. The

strangest thing, I looked down at the water and remembered how much I loved the river in that moment. The sound of the battle faded away as I stood there. I began to see water stained with the red of men's blood. I realized my own blood drippin' from my chest was addin' to the crimson color of the water. The sounds of battle rushed back into my head, and I don't remember much after that. Later I was told the bullet wound to my chest should have killed me that day. A day later fever and infection set in. The doctors in the hospital pretty much gave up on me livin' much longer."

Jack paused for a moment. Ell had become so focused on his story that she'd stopped sponging him with warm water. Jack began again, "They'd turned an old school near the river into a temporary hospital after the river battle. The doctors treated Yanks and Johnny Reb's in the same room. Most there cared not about the color of their uniform only about livin' and dyin'. I was filled with fever and delusion for over a week. The wound turned gangrenous, and the infection spread into the muscles in my chest damagin' them. Surgeons cut away the flesh to stop the infection, figurin' the operation would kill me. By some miracle the doctors saved my life in that terrible place of death and pain. After a few more days my fever broke, and the wild delusions of my unconscious world were gone. But the terrible reality of men at war still lay moanin' about me that hot July mornin'. I turned and could see out the window to what was now a quiet river crossin'. It was green again. The blood o'

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the battle had flowed away while I was lost in fever. I longed t' return home t' my life near the river."

Neither Ell nor Jack said anything after that.

Jack finished his bath and was so tired he didn't even remember going to bed that night.

In the morning the noise of a distant train whistle sounded and awakened Jack to the daylight world. For a moment he lay looking at the ceiling fan going 'round and 'round above his head. The fan was driven by a slim black belt that ran along the ceiling through a small opening in the wall. The latest in new electric motors hummed as it powered the pulleys that ran to several ceiling fans just on the other side of the four walls. Jack marveled at this new thing called electricity and what the future held.

He rubbed his eyes and felt his face. It was smooth and almost soft. He remembered the bath and Ell's gentle hand shaving his coarse whiskers. He could get used to a warm bath at least a couple times a month. His hands were wrapped in clean white linen to cover his wounds.

"Good mornin'," came a voice from near the window. Ell sat rocking in a big oak chair, wearing a silk robe and a bright smile. "How are you this mornin'?" she asked.

Jack sat up and looked at Ell. "Did we...?"

She chuckled and smiled even bigger, "No, you were asleep before you closed your eyes."

Jack sat up straight getting the kinks out of his back, "Good."

Ell look puzzled at his comment and then disappointed.

Jack saw her expression, “No, I, didn’t mean it that way. Only I just wondered...”

Ell laughed, “No, Jack, you were a perfect gentleman and you made me feel like a woman who cared for a man. We’ll call it even.”

Jack turned and slid his feet from the bed. He noticed he was now wearing pajama bottoms. He looked at them and then toward Ell with a questioning look.

“I’ll never tell,” Ell said. She stood up with a big grin and said, “Jack, there are clean clothes in the closet and a pair of shoes that should fit. Get dressed and come down to breakfast. Tilley left early this mornin’ to visit the banker t’ see if she could find out anything about your box of treasure. She should return soon.”

Jack found the clothes and shoes Ell told him about. The shoes were fine but the clothes were a little fancy for his taste. They weren’t clothes like men wore when working the river. More likely the kind big city men wore. Still Jack was in town to find out about the Miss Boston, and if he blended in it may make findin’ information a little easier.

He looked in the mirror, and on the ledge in front of it were a comb and brush. The kind a gentleman used to put his hair in order. Jack took the brush and stared at himself in the mirror. *I ain’t used to usin’ a real mirror when I comb my hair*, he thought to himself.

After a few minutes Jack could smell bacon frying. Last night he was too tired to eat anything, but this morning was a different story.

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Cleaned up and wearing fancy clothes, he was a man of style, but he was also as hungry as a river man.

He opened the door and could hear voices downstairs. Then the corner door opened and a young lady Jack hadn't yet met came out of the room grinning at him as she approached. Jack hesitated and then asked, "Excuse me, have you seen a man named Billy this mornin'?"

The young lady smiled and looked toward the door next to Jack's. "Was he the feller with Rose last night?"

Jack had to think for a moment. "Yeah, that was her name. Have you seen them?"

The girl giggled once more, "They're in there." She pointed to the closed door next to Jack's.

Jack eased open the door and looked in. In a whispered voice Jack called to Billy. He guessed Billy was the lump under the blanket. "Billy, hey, get up, we got to get goin'. Billy, did you hear me?"

There was a stir under the blankets and Billy's head appeared above the white sheet. Eyes full of sleep and hair that went every which way it could. "What's up Jack?"

Jack started to answer when a second head appeared; it was Rose. "Don't tell Tilley," she meekly requested as she leaned over and gave Billy a quick kiss. The next moment Rose sprang from bed with her white butt shining as she headed into the dressing room.

"Come on, Billy, breakfast is ready and Tilley went over to Wheelin' to get us some information." Jack closed the door and

headed down the steps to return to the kitchen where they'd opened the treasure box last night.

The large table in the dining room was surrounded by the young ladies who worked for Tilley. Five of them to be exact. He forgot Rose was still upstairs, so that meant six were members of Tilley's family.

"Over here," Jack heard a familiar voice say. It was Ell. She patted the chair next to hers and motioned for Jack to join her and the girls.

"Good mornin', ladies. How are you this fine mornin'?" They all seemed to talk at the same time, and each seemed to know what was being said. Jack didn't share that skill of separating five conversations at once.

Ell patted him on the leg, "They get a little carried away in the mornin's; kinda ignore 'em. I do, and it makes it easier to eat."

Jack just grinned cordially at the table of ladies as their independent conversations went on.

"Is that your boat down in the channel, Captain?" a blond-haired girl of not more than twenty asked Jack. When she did, all the other conversations stopped in mid-sentence and all eyes looked at him.

"Yes ma'am, the Mary E is my boat."

"We don't get many riverboat captains here anymore. The wooden dam they're gonna construct across the north of the island will prevent them from enterin' the back channel. It's a difficult

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maneuver for most boats to get around.” The blond-haired girl seemed to know something about riverboats and the river.

“The Mary E has a very shallow draft, and we took a chance in the dark comin’ in, but the risk to get to Tilley’s was worth it.”

The young blonde grinned sexily and said in a coy voice. “It’s always worth the risk to come to Miss Tilley’s.” The girls all laughed.

With the front door open and only the screen door between inside and outside, Jack could see Tilley’s carriage pulling up out front. For a big woman she could move smoothly up the steps and into the house pretty quickly.

“Jack, I found out somethin’ for you. That box may have somethin’ in it after all.”

Jack’s curiosity was aroused again. Tilley walked over to the sink where last night she’d left the serving platter with the piece of paper drying on it. She lifted the towel and carefully brushed away the salt. As it landed in the sink, Jack joined her and could see the salt had absorbed much of the stain. Carefully Tilley lifted the paper to the window. With the morning light against the backside of the paper, Jack started to make out some more of the writing, but it was badly faded by the river water and rust. The dyes in the ink had been leached out into the water.

“Still can’t read much on there,” Jack said as he squinted to try and read.

Tilley slapped him upside his arm and said, “Watch this.” She took the other lemon they’d cut in two last night, and placing the

paper against the glass she began rubbing the open side of the lemon on the paper. It was like magic; the faded ink on the paper had left what Tilley called water marks. They were faint but readable.

By now the girls had joined Jack and Tilley and were pressing them against the sink while trying to see for themselves.

"You ladies get back. This don't concern you." Tilley put on her spectacles and joined Jack in squinting at the faintly visible words on the paper.

Jack began reading the words. *"Sir, I have at great peril to myself, obtained this sample of the first nails to come off the experimental wire fed nail machines. The speed at which nails can be produced is astounding. These machines can produce ten times as many nails from each run and do it in a quarter of the time. The number of nails that can be produced in the same time period when compared to the square-cut versions is astronomical.*

"Captain Peters will explain the secure location of the machines that produced this first run of nails. I trust that all will be ready to reproduce the new design at our location in Savannah. If your company can manufacture this piece of new technology, it will help the cause we are all so proud to be part of. I do this for the independence of the South and my family name.

Signed,

Mr. Charles Bourdon"

"Well I'll be dammed," Tilley spouted out as she lowered her glasses and stepped back and looked at Jack. "Jack what have you got yourself into? Do you know who Charles Bourdon is?"

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“Some guy who stole a new kind o’ nail to sell at a profit? So what? It can’t be that big a thing.”

“Jack, Charles Bourdon is a businessman who came north after the war and had the backin’ from southern investors in buyin’ heavy industry in the area. Some say he came outta Texas right after the war began back in the ’60s. He’s part of a group o’ men who wanted t’ take over the northern part of Mexico and create a new slave state. Their scheme didn’t work and they came north and were often labeled southern sympathizers. In the beginnin’ they were part of an organization calling themselves ‘Knights of the Golden Circle.’ Over time, there were those who had more radical ideals. They split off and called the new organization Order of Southern Liberty. After the war it was said the group disbanded. But Bourdon and the others has always been rumored still to be part of the branch made up of businessmen and politicians. Their goal was t’ dominate economic growth through sheer industrial strength. Bourdon and the others still are believed t’ wanna rebuild the south into a separate country with strong ties t’ slavery. He has the ruthlessness t’ do what the proper businessmen won’t do. His organization backs him financially and looks the other way as to his methods.”

Jack had heard of this shadowy group of men who believed the south could rise again if enough money could be raised. Many in Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia still wanted to become independent of the United States. For many, especially in the South, the war was not over and would never be. They had been low-key

but hoped they could regroup into an industrial giant to be a major financial force based in the South. This time they hoped to become independent not with guns and war but with money, power, and a strong industrial base. Lee's army thirty-five years ago couldn't do it, but they believed they could buy their own country this time with their own twisted ideas.

"Jack, be careful; he's a dangerous man."

"What did you learn from your banker friend?" Jack asked as they sat down at the table.

Tilley began by telling the young girl, whom Jack met earlier, to get her and Jack a cup of coffee. "Well Jack," Tilley began as she looked around the table. "Where's Rose?" And then she got this look on her face like someone's going to be in trouble and the same tone was in her voice. "And where's Billy?" Tilley turned and looked up the steps and hollered toward the upstairs, "ROSE, GET YOUR ASS DOWN HERE! YOU TOO, BILLY!"

Jack laid his hand on her arm, "Tilley, forget about them. What did the banker tell you?"

"Jack, do you know that nearly sixty percent of the world's nails come from right across the river there? There's nary a house or boat or anything made from wood that doesn't get nailed together with nails produced over there. Wheeling has a hold on the industry, pretty much throughout the world. The banker speculated that this is a new style of nail he's been hearin' about bein' developed by one o' the biggest nail companies there is, the Berger and Sons

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Manufacturing Company. Came over from Sweden twenty years ago and built their empire with old money and new technology and cheap labor. Those Swiss have a knack for developin' new types o' machinery from old ideas. Word has it that they're ready to patent a new machine that'll produce nails beyond anything out there now."

From upstairs came the sound of giggling as Billy and Rose made their way down the steps toward the kitchen filled with people. "What's for breakfast?" Billy asked.

"I told you two no hanky-panky, didn't I?" Tilley said in her sternest voice possible.

Billy walked around the table and kissed Tilley on the cheek. "Good mornin' beautiful." Billy smiled as he patted Tilley on her fancy-fixed hair.

"Hey, don't touch that! It cost me five dollars t' get it t' sit up there like that." She grinned at Billy, "You know I can't resist a sweet-talker." She turned and raised an eyebrow toward Rose. "And you, young lady, I'll deal with later."

Billy stood up beside Tilley, placed his thumbs in his pockets, and leaned back all proud-like. "Jack, how do you like my new duds? Why, a fine bath and clean city clothes makes me feel, well, respectable."

Jack stood up and finished his coffee before setting the cup on the table. "All right Billy; let's go check the Mary E in the daylight to make sure she's okay. I wanna see if that snag we picked up last night near the paddle can be pushed off with a shore pike."

Tilley grabbed Jack's hand and stopped him for a second, "Don't you boys get them clothes messed up. They stay here when you put back to riverin'."

Jack lifted her hand, gave it a kiss, and patted it. "Tilley, I promise we won't damage any of these fancy city clothes."

Jack and Billy started for the back door when Tilley called to them, "Jack, the banker said you need to go to south Wheeling, near the incline. There's a bar there. You need to find a man named Mudder, who owns the place. For a price, he can find out any piece of information you want to know."

Jack pulled his pockets out revealing they were empty, "And just how can I pay for information?"

"Just tell him I sent you. We go back a long way. That should cover his expenses." Tilley poured herself another cup of coffee and leaned back against the sink counter. Jack and Billy excused themselves to check the boat.

The riverbank that led down to the back channel looked a lot different in the daylight. Jack had forgotten how steep it was down to the water. "Don't forget that lantern you put over in the weeds last night." Jack pointed toward the tall weeds at the top of the steps. Billy pulled them back and retrieved the light.

"Jack, what are you doin'? We don't need to check the boat. It's fine. She's tied off in the deepest part of the channel, and no one is likely to bother her, anyway."

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"I know, but I don't like leavin' 'er stern pointed up-current. Besides, we can see how hard it's gonna be to clear the snag we picked up on the way in. Anyway, I need some fresh air that's not filled with French perfume." Billy laughed and nodded his head in agreement.

The two men made their way down the steep set of steps and onto the wooden dock. "Right where we left her. Tight and secure," Billy told Jack as he jumped aboard. "I'll grab the pike and meet you in back."

Jack nodded that he understood as he made his way along the starboard side looking down into the river as he went. Reaching the paddle section, he looked at the bucket boards to see if in the daylight any further damage could be seen, especially to the boards underwater. The paddle wheel had a dip of about three feet when sitting idle and a little deeper when she was underway. Jack could see almost that deep into the green water and saw no more problems.

Billy came from the port side with a long pole that had a metal barb on one end. He tried to dislodge the tree limb caught near the edge in front of the paddles. Not only was the limb jammed in tight, but so were a couple boards that looked like small barrel staves. Billy worked them around and finally was able to move the debris out away from the paddle.

"Billy, use the pike and pull them boards over here so I can reach 'em. There's some writin' on 'em."

Billy worked the two small boards out of the tree limb and over to the side of the boat. Jack leaned down as far as he could and retrieved the two boards. One was burned badly and he couldn't make out the words. On the other was a partial word painted on the board, CARB--E. AVOID GET---G WET.

"What the heck does it say, Jack?"

"Not sure, but I saw these kinds o' boards floatin' all around us after the explosions. Tilley says Mudder can find any answer; we'll ask him if he knows what was inside those barrels."

The two men began walking toward the bow of the boat, and as they approached the front deck Jack stopped and looked at the board one more time. He mouthed the letters and tried to make words he understood. But nothing came to him. He tossed the board onto the tarp that covered the salvaged material from the Boston. The two men headed toward Tilley's to have some breakfast with the ladies.

"Jack you sure smell goooooood."

Jack didn't respond.

Chapter 7

Warm Biscuits

The two men ran up the steps and onto the back porch. Before they could open the screen door, from inside they heard Tilley's voice. "You two, wipe your feet before you come in this house!"

Both men looked down at their shoes; they were covered in sand and a little river mud. "Damn, we're in for it now," Billy said as he looked for a broom to brush clean his new brown shoes.

Jack ran back down the steps and began wiping his shoes in the tall grass. In a minute Billy joined him. "You two look like you're doin' a fancy dance or stepped in dog shit. Either way, make sure you clean it off before comin' in. That cleanin' lady o' mine gets pretty upset when there's mud on the floor. And I'll be dammed if she don't ask for a raise every time she gots to cleanup you men's muddy footprints."

After a bit of doing, the two men examined their shoes and declared them clean. Up the steps in search of breakfast they went.

The girls kept the two men entertained while they ate their breakfast. Jack enjoyed the ladies' company for a change but still preferred the quiet life on the river. He sometimes thinks about a full-time woman; trouble is, he's too old to change and ain't likely no woman, worth saying the words with, would want to live in an old wharf boat on the river. The first time she walked on the deck and a

big old green water snake crawled on board to get warm, she'd most likely take to high ground and be gone.

The coffee was hot and the food was the best both men had eaten for breakfast in a long time. Billy, with a mouthful of fried taters, said to Jack, "Suppose Brother-in-law wonders where we are?"

Jack was sitting back in his chair enjoying the moment when Billy asked. "He knew we was gonna come in the backside of the island, so he knows the only place in the back channel t' tie up the boat is at Tilley's. It just makes good sense we'd spend the night. Yep, most likely he figured we'd spend the night."

A small Chinese man appeared at the back door and looked through the screen. In a heavy Oriental accent he asked for "Miss Tilley, please."

"Boys, there's your clothes. You owe Mr. Chang fifty cents for cleaning. Oh, I almost forgot, you all ain't got no money." Tilley opened the door and handed the man some change in exchange for the clean but well-worn clothes. "Iffin' you two are goin' t' south Wheeling to see Mudder, you best look like river men. Ain't as likely gonna raise as much suspicion bein' dressed in your own clothes." Tilley handed the two men their clothes, and they disappeared upstairs to change. A few seconds later, Rose started up the steps. "Now you just hold on there, girl, get your butt back down here and eat breakfast and leave that poor man alone. He likely got a long day ahead of him and needs his strength for goin' t' the south-end bar to see Mudder."

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Rose's disappointment showed as she slowly turned and rolled her lower lip over her top one as she returned to the big table. The other girls just giggled at Rose's disappointment. She stuck her tongue out at them, and they all giggled even louder.

Before long, the two men reappeared and walked quickly down the steps. Their big old work boots made lots of noise on the polished oak steps. "You don't suppose you two could pick up them clodhoppers and not make so much noise?" Tilley stood looking up at the two men coming down the steps.

Billy put his arms around Tilley and gave her a big kiss. "Darlin', you know I love you more than my five-dollar pocket watch." Billy gave Tilley a gentle slap on her backside.

"You know the rules, Billy Meyers, no gettin' fresh with the ladies outside business hours and only with me when I say so." She gave Billy a big grin and then turned serious when she told them. "You be careful down in the south end. Them boys don't play nice t' strangers that come callin' and askin' questions."

Billy gave her a quick wink and started for the front porch. He'd seen Rose peeking in from the screen door. Jack finished tucking his shirt in and buttoning the clean shirt up to the top button. He stopped and looked down at his side where the rust stain had been last night. He could barely make it out on the faded blue shirt. "That Chinese feller did a good job, almost made these old clothes look good again. I forget sometimes workin' on the river how good clean clothes can feel on a feller's skin." Jack's clothes were clean

and pressed and he doesn't ever remember not having them wrinkled, except when they first came off the store shelf. He was sure those wrinkles were still there, just taking a rest before coming back.

"Jack, Mudder's no fool. Be careful." Tilley cautioned him.

"How will I recognize him?"

"You'll know him when you see him. He controls the south end and trusts no one. But if anyone can help, it's him."

Jack looked behind Tilley standing next to the front door. He could see Ell patiently standing there. "Thanks Tilley, I'll bring you somethin' pretty when I come back."

"Well, with that bankroll in your pocket I can't wait to see what that'll be." Tilley had turned and seen Ell waiting for Jack. "Say your good-byes and get your butt outta here. Jack, go north till you see the new trolley that's runnin' back and forth from Wheeling t' Bridgeport. All electrified and everything, we're movin' toward the twentieth century. Over in Wheeling there's one that goes south to where you're goin'." She reaches into her pocket and hands him ten dollars and fifty cents in coins. "Costs a nickel to ride, and you may need some money to buy a drink or two at the tavern. Don't take all ten dollars out and let anyone see it. Might think you're rich or somethin'." Tilley laughed and stepped out of the way so Jack could walk to where Ell was standing.

The difference in height made Jack seem to tower over the small-framed woman standing before him. Ell in her bare feet and Jack in

his boots added to the difference. She reached up and unbuttoned his shirt down two button holes. At the second he takes her hand to prevent any more being opened, she looks up and smiles. "A woman likes to see the chest of a man, especially when it's dark and tanned like yours." She noticed the blue in his shirt enhanced his dark eyes. They were brighter after a good night's sleep.

"Ell, I'd like..."

Ell put her hand up to his lips to stop the words. "When you get this behind you, we'll talk."

Jack leaned down and Ell stood on tiptoes as they kissed. The girls from the kitchen all made the sound of "Aaaaah," as the two embraced. Tilley turned to the ladies and shooed them back into the kitchen. "You girls go on an' give them two a minute."

Jack stroked Ell's long flowing hair as they said nothing but smiled at one another. From the kitchen they heard Tilley questioning, "Where's that Rose?"

Jack looked out onto the porch where Billy and Rose were saying their goodbyes, too. He saw Rose take down the steps and head around toward the back of the house when she heard Tilley's call.

Jack stepped back from Ell until their hands no longer touched. He turned toward the kitchen where Tilley and the girls were watching. "Ladies, you are all treasures to men." They all smiled and giggled, and he saw Rose trying to open the back screen door without being noticed. He turned and went out in the new day's sunshine

with Billy waiting at the bottom of the steps. "Well, let's go see your brother-in-law and see if we can find out what we're into."

The two men started down the street toward the suspension bridge that led to Wheeling. Jack turned and saw Ell standing on the porch in the morning sun. She raised her hand to wave goodbye. It made him feel good to have someone to say goodbye to.

"Tilley said one of them new electrified trolleys up on Virginia Street travels back and forth regular. We could ride over to Wheelin' if we had a mind to." The two came up to a busy street and could see the tracks laid out in the bricks where the trolley ran.

Billy looked toward the back channel and saw in the distance the new bridge being built across to Ohio. "I saw that bridge last night when we came under it but weren't sure if it was open yet."

Jack looked for a moment toward the bridge, but was more interested in looking for the trolley car that traveled the street. It was nowhere in sight. "Come on, Billy, we're gonna walk over t' Wheelin'. I ain't a waitin' for the trolley." The two men went along the street filled with wagons moving goods and material across the river to the large number of manufacturing sites in the area.

When they went out onto the suspension bridge, Billy wasn't sure he liked the high place above the river. "Jack, how high are we?"

"Don't know for sure. Higher than the stacks on a big steamer, I'd reckon, since they pass under here. Some of them tall stacks go near ninety feet, but they have those hinged stacks to pass under bridges on the river." Jack stopped and looked straight down, "Far

piece to the water," He spat, and the wind carried it south for a distance till it disappeared from view. "Well, Billy, just don't fall."

Billy had his eyes half-closed as he stepped away from the bridge's edge into the lane used by passing wagons. He wasn't comfortable at all on the great bridge. Near the Wheeling side Jack stopped and looked down at the river wharf below. The men in dark suits and New York type hats were still down there.

He noticed south to where the small creek came out into the river, the same place where he had put Brother-in-law and Joshua ashore last night. Two small boats with men were rowing in circles just out from the mouth of the creek. It looked like they were dragging, looking for something lost in the river. Jack was puzzled for a moment, and then he thought about Brother-in-law and the boy. "Billy, come on, let's get to your brother-in-law's. I want to make sure they're okay."

Jack was curious and wanted to find out what the men were looking for at the mouth of the creek. He and Billy made their way down Main Street until they got to where they could take a shortcut through an alleyway toward the river wharf. Jack stopped for a moment and put his hand in front of Billy as an indication to stop. "Gonna reconnoiter some information from them fellers on the wharf. That means we ask real easy-like, what's goin' on downriver. Don't want any attention drawn to us." Billy acknowledge with a simple nod.

“Hey, you fellers lookin’ for some hands to work the wharf when a boat comes in?” Jack asked.

“We don’t do the hirin’ here. You need to go over to the office and ask. Don’t think there’s any need right now, though.” The man who answered must have been the boss. The tall slender man had a wide brim hat and carried a clipboard. The sleeves of his starched white shirt were rolled up even and neat. His skin was well tanned. There was no doubt he spent a lot of time in the sun.

Jack looked down the river toward the circling boats and kind of made like he was straining his neck to see what was going on. “What’s them fellers doin’? Tryin’ to catch a big catfish?”

“No, a guy fell from the bridge just before daylight this mornin’. Well, we aren’t really sure if he fell or if he mighta had a little help. Them that saw said two men were with him just before he went headlong into the river. Current always brings the bodies toward the sandbar on the north side o’ the creek. Most likely he drifted into there.” The boss’s attention turned from the activity downriver to Jack and Billy, “Who’d you boys say you worked for?”

Jack glanced at Billy before answering. Billy knew that meant to shut up. “Didn’t say; we come in on the train over in Bridgeport early this mornin’. Feller over there said good men who weren’t afraid o’ work could get on over at the wharf unloadin’ steamers. Said the boss was hard, but a fair man.” Jack kind of pulled back and looked at the questioning boss man and said, “I guess that’d be you.”

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The boss wasn't expecting an offhand compliment like that, and it made him forget whatever his question was about the two men. "No work here, but I'm sure one o' the mills in the south end is a hirin'."

Jack thanked the man kindly, and the two turned and headed back toward Main Street. "Let's go see Brother-in-law."

Billy agreed and said, "Yeah, his wife makes some o' the finest biscuits I ever had."

Jack looked at him questioningly. "You just ate at Tilley's!"

The two men made their way to Twelfth Street and headed toward the hill to where Brother-in-law's house was located. It was a small place, with not much of a yard. Billy's sister had a love for flowers. In front of the house was a neatly kept flowerbed full of bright yellow and orange marigolds. Their bright colors seemed out of place in this neighborhood of faded paint on dilapidated houses. It had been several years since the wooden siding on most of the houses in the neighborhood had been painted. Below each siding board on the houses was a layer of dark gray dirt from coal stoves. In the slight recess below each lap of the siding boards the dirt collected where the spring rains couldn't reach to wash it away. No nevermind, every house was pretty much the same. The yellow and orange flowers brought a small oasis of color to this dull place.

The windows at Billy's sister's house were clean, and the light blue drapes moved gently in the air currents in and around the house. An empty porch swing hung by two rusty chains and swayed in the

breeze. The sound of the squeaking chains could be heard as it moved back and forth with the wind.

Two full milk bottles were at the bottom of the cut-stone steps leading up to the house. They'd been delivered earlier that morning and no one had yet come to retrieve them. Jack leaned down and picked up the bottles as he headed up to the house. The bottles still felt a bit cool.

Billy knocked on the screen door and called inside, "Anybody t' home?"

No answer for a moment and then the big yeller dog pushed open the screen door, tail waggin' as he greeted the two men. Sarah, Billy's sister, appeared next drying her hands on her apron. "Damn, Billy, you look older every time I see you."

Billy laughed, "Well Sis, I say you get t' lookin' more like Ma every time I sees you. And she was a handsome woman." They laughed.

"I always knew you should've gone into politics, the way you lie with a straight face." They both laughed again as the three and the dog went into the house.

Sarah was a woman with a round face and big smile that filled a room. She and Brother-in-law had no children and lived a good life from what Brother-in-law made working the steamers up and down the river in the good months. Sarah baked pies and breads for the local restaurants just down the hill in the city to earn extra money. Some years when the dry season slowed the traffic on the river,

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money earned from her baking kept the household going. In the early days, Brother-in-law was likely to get into trouble at stops along the river, but losing that ear, either in a bar fight or to a big red-headed gal, helped him to settle down. Sarah was a good woman and Brother-in-law grew to realize that over time.

“Where’s brother-in-law?” Billy asked.

“Where do you believe he is? He’s still in bed. Said he didn’t get much sleep night before last when he made his way downriver to find you two birds.” Sarah reached for the coffee pot sitting on the stove. “You all want some coffee? And you, Jack Dulin, I still remember the terrible French coffee you brought here last year. Any man who tries to sell that crap ought to be shot.”

Sarah’s kitchen wasn’t fancy by any stretch of the imagination. The ceiling was made from tongue-and-groove boards that long ago were painted white. The ceiling over the stove showed the darkened evidence of years of cooking and heat. The shelves around the kitchen were hidden by curtains that looked like they’d been made from old red-and-white checked tablecloths. Below the counter and sink the openings were covered with material from colorful old feed sacks. The icebox was located beside the door that led onto the back porch, which made it easier to dump the melted ice water from the box each day. At regular times the iceman delivered a new supply of ice to the kitchen door. The pleasant man always placed the ice in Sarah’s icebox compartment and she most likely rewarded him with a couple of her warm biscuits covered in strawberry jam.

Jack and Billy sat down at the neatly arranged table and laughed at Sarah's comments about Jack's French coffee enterprise. Both indicated to Sarah they'd prefer her good coffee.

Billy asked, "Sis, where's the boy?"

"I sent him down the hill to the newsstand to get a paper. Thought you'd like to know what's bein' said in the news about the steamer that Delmar was workin' on when it went to ground a couple days ago. He told me you managed to salvage some of her cargo before she broke up. Also told me about some terrible explosion from under the water. I just figured he'd been drinkin' some with the story he told me."

Jack pulled the top of the milk bottle open and poured a little in his coffee. He resealed it and placed both bottles in the icebox. "Sarah, those biscuits do smell as good as Billy described them comin' over this mornin'."

Sarah smiled as she removed a small jar of homemade jam from the icebox and set it on the table between the two men.

From a narrow set of steps leading to the upstairs Brother-in-law appeared, still in his underwear. "With all this noise down here a man can't get a good night's sleep."

Sarah turned to the two sitting at the table and said, "Don't let him fool you, he sleeps on his good ear and don't hear a thing. Especially come Sunday mornin' when I call to him to get ready for church. Says he doesn't hear me. You reckon he won't hear the

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Good Lord when He calls him home? Delmar, go put your pants on. We got company and the boy will be back soon.”

“All right Ma, I’ll get dressed.” Brother-in-law turned and headed down the hallway to the backside of the house.

The squeak of the front screen door opening announced the boy’s return. He promptly tossed the morning’s newspaper on the table and headed over to where Sarah was removing the hot biscuits from the oven. “Careful, son, they’re hot; you got to let them cool. Besides, you need to eat the oatmeal I made you before you get a biscuit with jam.” The boy looked disappointed but sat down and began eating the warm bowl of cereal she’d put on the table for him.

Jack picked up the paper and, bigger than life, the front page headlines in bold print told what Jack was looking for, PIRATES SCUTTLE STEAMER BOSTON. Jack couldn’t believe what he was reading. The story told of how pirates had slipped a member of their crew on board and sabotaged the big steamer. It went on to tell of how the captain and crew worked frantically but were unable to save her before she went aground and rolled in a deep channel in the river. The story put her last location somewhere north of the town of Parlorton. The facts for the story were given to the paper by the boat’s owner, Mr. Charles Bourdon.

“Why, that’s all lies, that weren’t how it happened at all.” Billy exclaimed.

“Wait, there’s more,” Jack indicated. “Law enforcement officials are looking for a single-stacked steamer that was seen in the area.

Officials hope to question the captain and crew to find out what they may know about the mysterious disaster. A five-thousand-dollar reward is being offered for information concerning the whereabouts of the lost boat. A reward also is being offered for information about the single-stacked boat believed to be in the area at the time. Please contact the sheriff's department with any information."

Jack couldn't believe what he was reading; the SOB was trying to blame the wreck on him and his crew.

Brother-in-law came down the hall pulling his pants up tight as he came into the kitchen. "What's the word, fellers, you find anything out about the Boston." Every eye in the room looked strangely at him. "What'd I do?"

Jack got up from the table and walked around to where he was standing and looked him straight in the eyes. "What was on that boat besides whiskey, cigars, and a box of nails?" Jack spoke in a demanding voice.

Brother-in-law was stunned by the sudden change of attitude toward him. Billy picked up the paper and showed him the headlines. He wasn't much of a reader, so Sarah pointed to the words as she read them to him.

Brother-in-law stammered for a few seconds before he answered. "There weren't anythin' unusual about the cargo. There was the stuff we went after to salvage and sell downriver. There were ten big crates tied down in the middle of the front cargo area that I figured held some kinda heavy machinery. Toward the bow was a few dozen

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small barrels. Never even looked to see what was in 'em. They didn't have a bung hole for tapping, so I figured they weren't beer. They was coated in a waxy-lookin' stuff. Other than that, just an ordinary-lookin' cargo. Can't say she was loaded heavy; if anythin' she was runnin' light. Either way, it weren't no nevermind to me. I was just a workin' cargo hand along for the ride, until the wreck."

Jack looked at the paper's headlines again and then back to Brother-in-law, "What was in the big crates?"

"I don't know. They were just wooden crates like hundreds of others I've seen over the years. The only thing I remember that was unusual about them, now that I think about it, is where they were goin'. Southern Investors Company, Muskingum City, Ohio, same as what was on the cigar box that had the treasure inside. Hey, that's right, the treasure, how much was inside? Where's my cut? I told Sarah I'd buy her some new stuff for the house." Both Sarah and Brother-in-law looked at Jack questioningly.

"Just a box o' nails. Sounded like treasure, but when we opened the box over at Tilley's last night, weren't anythin' but rustin' nails inside."

Sarah hit Brother-in-law upside the arm with the back of her hand. "I swear, Delmar, you are full of more stories than a five-cent detective's paper."

Brother-in-law rubbed his arm. "Damn, woman, that hurt."

Jack picked up the paper again and continued the story. He finished the front page and continued to page seven for the rest of

the story. Three paragraphs down, there it was; the boat was insured by the Southern Investment Company of Muskingum City, Ohio through a Pittsburgh-based insurance company. Jack laid the paper on the table and sat back down before saying to himself, "I hope that Mudder feller can help us figure out what's goin' on."

Both Sarah and Brother-in-law looked at Jack after his comment. "Mudder? Are you goin' t' see him?"

"Yeah, Tilley told me he'd know the answers to my questions about the Boston." Jack held his hand out as if to stop any further questions. "I know Mudder's the big boss in the south end. Don't make no nevermind if he's got the answers; we have to find out what he knows. Especially now that the authorities are looking to question us about the Boston's wreck."

"How do you know Mudder ain't involved in this too?" Sarah asked Jack as she set the plate of hot biscuits on the table between the three men and the boy. The big yeller dog's head stood as high as the table, and he laid his chin next to the boy staring at the plate of warm biscuits.

"From what Tilley told me, Mudder controls gamblin' and alcohol in the south end. He even makes some money loanin' out, iff'n' you can afford the interest. If you can't afford his interest payments, he might have your leg or arm broken. But he ain't a pirate of riverboats. He only controls what's in his south-end territory." Jack bit into his biscuit covered in strawberry jam. He

closed his eyes and said, "Sarah, them's the best biscuits this side o' heaven."

"Brother-in-law can't go with us," Billy told Jack and Sarah. "There are those that know he was one of the crew when the Boston left the wharf on her way downriver. Not sure what happened to the rest o' the crew, but if Brother-in-law shows up, most likely he's gonna have t' answer a bunch o' questions." Billy took Sarah's hand. "Sis, I ain't gonna let anythin' happen to that one-eared feller o' yours." Sarah took both her hands and squeezed Billy's.

Jack turned his attention to the boy who was sitting next to him feeding the big yeller dog. "Son, you and your dog are one mystery we need to find out about before someone comes lookin' for you and says we kidnapped you or worse. Where you from?"

The boy, for a moment, only paid attention to the dog eating his biscuit. Then Sarah came around the table and knelt down beside the boy and rubbed the dog's head. "I think your dog likes my biscuits." The boy nodded. "Son, tell Jack where you're from, so he can help you."

The boy looked down for a moment and looked toward Jack sitting next to him. "Ain't nobody gonna come lookin' for me. Parents're gone, and me and Sunny run off from a home where they puts kids like me. First chance I got, I run, takin' Sunny with me. We hid near the river and saw the men loadin' the big riverboat. A bunch of men loaded the big wooden boxes on the boat I'm guessin' you asked Delmar about. Two men with guns stood watchin' as the

others loaded the boat. Me and Sunny was real quiet when they were there. When them fellers left, we snuck onto the boat and hid under a tarp on deck until the boat started downriver. We hid again when we stopped in Wheelin' to load stuff down there along the river." He pointed toward the river wharf. "We started back downriver, and when we went t' ground, the big shakin' o' the boat woke me and Sunny up. When we looked out we seen nobody's around. Then's when we searched on the empty boat, found some food and waited. You all came along the next day."

Jack sat back in the chairs and looked at the boy and his dog. He thought for a minute and rubbed his head. "Well I guess it ain't likely the Pittsburgh police are comin' after a fugitive kid and dog. We'll have to figure what to do with you later." The boy got a frightened look on his face and Jack could tell he thought they might send him away. "Son, relax. We'll see if we can't help you later, but first we got to figure out this mess we've gotten ourselves into."

Jack reached into his pocket to see what time his watch said. As he did, he felt the bottle he'd put there the night before. "Sarah, I almost forgot! That wonderful husband of yours told me t' fetch you this bottle o' French Perfume, come all the way from Paris, France."

Sarah took the bottle and at first didn't quite know what to do. She opened it and carefully smelled the contents. She smiled as she touched her fingertip to the top of the bottle and touched it to the sides of her neck. She turned to Brother-in-law and said, "Delmar, I love you."

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Billy, sat watching this all unfold and looked over at Jack. “Never could figure why women get all emotional about smellin’ like flowers. It’s a good thing men don’t have to wear that kind o’ stuff. I’d be takin’ a bath every day iff’n I had to wear that stuff. And I’m sure I don’t wanna do that more than a couple times a month.”

Brother-in-law looked toward the pair sitting at the table and didn’t know quite what to say. He knew his wife was happy with a present he didn’t even know he’d gotten her. But he was sure happy someone had thought of it for him.

Sarah set the bottle on the counter near the sink. She set it down as if it would explode if handled too hard. She stood back and looked at it for a few seconds and then turned it just right to face forward into the kitchen. She stepped back and wiped a tear of joy from her eyes and turned to the men watching her with fascination. “You boys want more coffee? Joshua, you want another biscuit for you and Sunny?” She was as happy as she’d been in a long time, even though it looked to her like Delmar had done something nice and unexpected, and didn’t seem to realize it.

Chapter 8

Mudder

Jack stood up and looked at the group in the kitchen. "Brother-in-law, you and the boy stay here while me and Billy go find this Mudder feller. If we ain't back by dark, go over and check on the boat behind Tilley's. Bein' off the main channel and hidden by the trees, shouldn't be anyone gonna see 'er there. Just make sure she's secure to the wharf. We should be back long before dark. Sarah, can you and Joshua take a walk down by the mouth o' the creek and see if they found that feller that went off the bridge this mornin'? Somethin' ain't right about that." Everyone at the table understood what Jack wanted. "Remember, Brother-in-law, don't be seen by anyone who knows you until we get this settled."

Jack and Billy stood up and moved their chairs under the table. Sarah picked up their coffee cups and placed them in the sink. She pumped the pitcher pump a couple times to run a little water over the cups and plates, dried her hands on her apron, and walked with the two men to the front porch. Sarah pushed against the corner of the screen that had come loose in the door, "Delmar keeps sayin' he's gonna fix that, and I keep puttin' it back in place." She grinned. She stepped close to Jack so just he could hear. "Thanks for the perfume." Jack realized she knew Brother-in-law didn't get it for her, that Jack and Billy did, and that it was fine with her.

Chuck Clegg

The two men walked down the stone steps to the sidewalk and stopped to look back at Sarah and the boy standing on the porch. Sarah raised her hand and waved goodbye. "Be careful Jack, you bring that brother o' mine back safe and sound; south end is a rough place if you ain't known by them that hang out down there."

"You worry too much, Sis, we'll be back," Billy said as he returned her wave.

The two started off down the hill toward Main Street and the trolley car. "You ever rode one of them electrified trolleys?" Jack asked Billy. He shook his head no.

By now downtown was abuzz with activity. Delivery wagons and trolley cars filled the street. From ice wagons making deliveries, small pieces of ice dropped onto the street, and a half-dozen kids were picking up the small pieces and putting them in their mouths as they ran around the horse-drawn wagons. The sounds of horses' metal shoes on the brick streets echoed off the tall stone and brick buildings.

Jack looked up Market Street and could see a trolley coming slowly down the incline. On the front of the open car was a big number five. The number was made from brass and polished to look almost like gold in the morning sun. The two men could see a sign that indicated Trolley Stop. Three men in suits and a couple women in fine dress stood waiting for the coming car. The sound of the electric motor and the occasional sparks overhead were new to Jack and Billy. The car's metal wheels screeched as she strained on her

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way down the incline, and after a few seconds, the metal wheels slowed and came to a stop. The man running the trolley officially told the waiting people to step aboard. Along the topside of the trolley was a sign advertising Mudondles Ale, finest Irish malt beer in town.

“Five cents, please,” the man indicated to the two men. They didn’t realize they needed to place the money in the coin device before being allowed to ride. Jack felt in his pocket and found some of the change Tilley’d given him and placed the proper fee into the device. The operator rang the bell and called out in his official tone. “Trolley moving—hands and feet inside at all times!” the stuffy operator declared when the trolley’s electric motor began to hum as it slowly started south.

Most of the people on the trolley looked straight forward and ignored other passengers. For Jack and Billy, this was a first-time adventure. They looked around as the trolley moved along the street she shared with several horses and horse-drawn wagons. Jack was amazed at how the trolleys and wagons never collided. The confusion in the street seemed to him to be a wreck waiting to happen.

Jack elbowed Billy, “I’m glad the river ain’t this busy. A feller would have a hard time gettin’ anywhere.”

As the trolley moved south, at each stop people got off the car. By the time they passed the south end’s open marketplace, most of the respectable type of people had exited the trolley. Jack and Billy,

along with a couple men who looked like mill workers, soon became the last of the riders on that trip. Billy jumped every time the trolley's electrical connection arced and made a sharp cracking sound. He could smell the ozone in the air at each arc.

The trolley car finally came to a stop, and the stuffy conductor once again sounded the bell, "End of the line. Please exit the car. Watch your step." Jack guessed this guy made the same speech with or without passengers on board. It was more of an official duty than for the convenience of the riders. The trolley had stopped on top of a turntable built in the roadway. After the passengers had safely exited, the operator walked to the other end and pulled the car in a half-circle until it was pointing in the opposite direction. He stepped aboard, rang the small bell, and called out, "All aboard!" He slid a lever. The power flowed into the energized motor, and the strange-sounding trolley moved away on its journey back uptown, empty of passengers.

Jack had been in this part of town a few years back—on the trip where he learned of his parents' deaths. The Mary E had needed a part that was manufactured in a small foundry shop nearby.

"Where to now, Jack?" Billy inquired.

Jack pointed down the street. "Tilley said go south until you can't go any further, and find Chapline Street. Then go south until we see Thirty-Third Street. At that point, I think we have to go toward the hill." The two men set out on foot to find Mudder in this unsavory part of town.

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The sun had risen almost overhead so Jack knew it would be close to noon by the time they reached the part of town where Mudder's tavern was located, and they cut through an alley to get over to the street where his small business was located.

"Time for some o' these people t' have the honey dipper clean their outhouses," Billy noted holding his nose. Along the back alley in this area of town most homes had their privies located alongside the alley. They tried to build them as far from the house as possible, but yet not too far in the event of an emergency. The small yards and narrow row houses were tightly packed together preventing the air currents to move the unpleasant odors away.

"I don't know how people can live like this, one house on top o' the other; no way can a man have any private business livin' like this." Jack nodded his head in agreement with Billy.

The two men finally found the tavern they were looking for at the end of a quiet brick street. It wasn't much of a building, and the back half of it was built into the hillside behind it. It looked small but, with part of it hidden in the hillside, most likely looks were deceiving. In this part of town they knew never to take anything at face value. Everything most likely hides something.

The two men opened the door and stepped inside the tavern. It took a couple seconds for their eyes to adjust to the dark after being out in the bright sunshine. Jack could smell cigar smoke, sweat, urine, and stale beer in the heavy air. As his eye adjusted, he could see only a few men sitting at the bar on the south wall. The dim

lights and smoke gave the room a closed-in feeling. The one thing both men were sure of was that every eye in the place was staring at them. For a few seconds, not a sound was made as the two stood just inside the open door, then a voice from the bar yelled out, "Shut the door. You're lettin' the damn flies out!"

Jack had spent years on the river and had walked into many a bar such as this one over the years. He knew the first minute is the most important in how this was going to turn out. He and Billy walked over to the bar and ordered beer as if they owned the joint. The people at the bar all looked down to where they stood and stared. The barkeep, a skinny little man with a week's worth of whiskers on his face and a half-burnt cigar in his mouth, came over to the far side of the bar. "Did you say you was a wantin' something mister?"

"Yeah, I said I want a couple cold beers. I heard that this hole in the hill keeps the coldest beer anywhere in town."

Smoke from the man's cigar was getting in his eyes, and he was squinting and blinking while he looked at the two men. "Uh huh, what kind you fellers drinkin'?"

Jack remembered that just over from the bar was the favorite local brewery. "I 'spect the only kind a man would want's the kind they make just over yonder." He pointed in the direction of the brewery.

The man said nothing else but went off toward the back against the hillside. In a minute he returned with two brown bottles of beer.

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“That’s four bits mister.” With a look of suspicion on his face, he then nearly demanded, “Where’d you say you boys’re from?”

Jack returned the look and tone with a fearless, “Didn’t say.” Jack paid the man and gave no other explanation. The two men stood drinking at the bar. Things seemed to go back to normal and small conversations began along the bar among the other men. The barkeep still stood looking hard at Jack and Billy.

While getting a lay of the land, so to speak, Jack made out like he was looking at some of the pictures on the wall behind the bar, then he turned toward the back of the smoky room as if to see whether or not any more hung on the other walls. In the far corner on the north side he saw, through the fog of smoke, two men sitting at a table, staring in his direction, not saying a word. He knew as soon as he made eye contact which man was Mudder.

In a conspiratorial tone, Jack said to Billy, “Well, here we go.” Jack got up and grabbed his beer with one hand and slid the other into his coat pocket to imply he might have some form of protection in there. He started toward the two silent men in the back. Billy followed close behind.

Jack heard something hit the bar, and the voice of the skinny barkeep said, “And just where are you two fellers thinkin’ you’re going?” Without looking, Jack knew it was most likely a shotgun he’d heard hit the bar. Billy looked and knew it was a shotgun. A shotgun with two great big barrels pointed directly at them.

Jack half-paused, moved his hand in his pocket, never looked at the skinny barkeep, and kept looking always steady toward the man sitting in the shadows. "I got business with Mudder."

From the smoke-filled shadows Jack heard, "What kind of business, Mr. Jack Dulin?"

He knows who I am, Jack thought to himself, and out loud, he said, "Lookin' for answers, and if you know who I am, then you must be Mudder, and I 'spect you already know why I'm here." Jack and Billy hadn't moved since the barkeep's challenge.

Without breaking eye contact with Jack, Mudder slightly turned his head and nodded toward the second man at the table, who got up and walked past the two men standing in the middle of the smoke-filled room. From the table the voice again spoke, "Mr. Dulin, if you're here to talk, you best be sittin' down over here." The two men started toward the man sitting at the table.

Mudder said, "Your sidekick can drink his beer at the bar, Dulin."

Billy stopped. Jack turned and told him it was okay. He looked at Billy and, in a whispered tone, said, "Remember they can kill us but they can't eat us. It's against the law in this city." Billy nervously laughed and turned back toward the bar where he defiantly looked at the barkeep and used two fingers to move the barrels of the shotgun sideways and away from him. The skinny barkeep just stared hard at Billy as he sat down on the bar stool.

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Jack approached the table and could see the man's face more clearly now. A big man, must be over six-foot-six tall. Heavy wiry hair down to his shoulders, and he had no right arm. It was missing clear up to his shoulder. Just plain gone. His face had no expression and gave no impression it had ever had any expression on it. On the table in front of him, a bottle of whiskey, two shot glasses, and a box of store-bought cigarettes. His left hand held a lit cigarette, and his fingers were yellow with the nicotine left there from years of smoking. Jack had seen hard men before, but Mudder, even with only one arm, looked as formidable as any he'd ever come across.

"I'll say one thing for you, Mr. Dulin, you got balls. No brains, but lots o' balls." Mudder took a big slow drag on his cigarette and blew the smoke up toward the dark ceiling.

Jack reached over to Mudder's cigarettes and helped himself to one, lit it, then poured himself a shot of whiskey in the second glass. He drank it and then stared at the big man. The two hard men traded stares without words.

Mudder looked at him for a long moment and without warning broke into a belly laugh. "Yes sir, Dulin, lots of balls and no brains. Any man who takes on that son-of-a-bitch Bourdon can't be too smart."

Jack looked hard at the one-armed man and said, "Do I know you?"

“We’ll get t’ that. You’re here t’ find out what was on the Boston when she went down, right? You know Bourdon owns that damn boat, don’t you?”

Jack was still baffled by Mudder’s almost friendly change in demeanor as he answered the big man. “Yes, but what could be on board that’s so important to him that he’d put up a five-thousand dollar reward for her location?”

“Don’t forget he’s got money on your head too, Jack. Why, I could turn you in and make a quick couple o’ thousand for my trouble—if I was of a mind to—but lucky for you I ain’t of a mind to.”

“If you know he’s looking for me, then you also know I own the boat they’re all looking for.”

“That’s no big secret, Dulin. You’re the only single-stacked steamer on this part o’ the river with a half-open main deck. Didn’t take too many brains to figure you’re the one they’re lookin’ for.”

The big man sat back in his chair and looked at Jack. “I seen your picture in the paper when you salvaged old man Bentley’s lost boat. Some said it couldn’t be done. Once I seen your picture I knew if any man alive had the willpower to try, it was you.”

Jack leaned forward with his elbows on the table and looked close at the man in the shadows. “Who are you? Do I know you?”

“First thing you need t’ know is that Charles Bourdon is the front man for a group of businessmen. They’re part of an underground group that believes they can build a new confederate empire in the

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south and base its strength on industrial power.” Mudder leaned toward Jack on his single arm. “Jack, this country’s growin’ because men can build things usin’ their brains and hands. Most anything engineers can conceive in their minds can be built nowadays. Industries use college-trained engineers to develop ideas that ten years ago were only marks on paper. Today, engineers are usin’ new skills to build those ideas. Hell, a little more’n fifty years ago, they said a bridge over the Ohio was impossible. Engineers with ideas and men with steel nerves proved, to them that said it couldn’t be done, they were wrong.”

Jack stopped him. “All right, I’m just a riverboat pilot. I don’t know anything o’ this grand industrial dream you talk of, and I don’t know who Charles Bourdon is.”

“Yes you do. You might not have known him by name, but he used to be known as Captain Charles Bourdon. Captain Bourdon’s the man who shot you when you tried to save him from that situation tangled in the saddle riggin’ of his horse as he tried to cross the Ohio River at Buffington Island.”

Jack stopped the big man’s story and looked suspiciously at Mudder. “It can’t be him, most likely he was killed on that wild horse in the river.”

“Damn near was. His horse was shot and went down in a couple feet o’ water. The captain was penned under him, half underwater. He struggled to get free from his dyin’ horse. Some fool federal lieutenant run in and pulled your ass to safety and then went back

after the drownin' captain. By then he'd taken in a whole lot of water, and he wasn't movin'. As the lieutenant was pullin' Bourdon out of the river, a gunboat in mid-river fired a cannon shell that struck him in the top o' the right shoulder."

The two men sat for a minute. Said nothing. Mudder poured them both a drink without a word. After what was most likely a whole minute, Jack said, "There is no way you can be that lieutenant and remember all that so clearly from thirty-five years ago."

Mudder didn't respond. He looked at Jack for a second. "You were on the second floor of the old school in the bed near the window. Crazy in the head, you were, crying out in wild pain. When those butcherin' doctors worked on the wound in your chest they had no laudanum to give you for the pain. The doctors tied you to the bed and cut the rotten flesh away with a plain kitchen knife. Jack, you should've died that day. I should've too; they used the same knife to remove what was left of my mangled arm. You were mad with fever and don't likely remember that terrible day. I had no such situation. I was awake, and they told me if I didn't let them take my arm I'd die. I should've died; it would've been easier."

Jack drank his shot, poured another, and drank it even faster. He stared at the hard man telling the story from so long ago. "I don't remember you."

"They moved me to the army hospital in Pomeroy after they took my arm. Don't remember much for a week after that. When I regained consciousness, there was a confederate soldier in the bed

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beside me—had the raging fever. They figured he'd die. It was the captain who shot you and that I pulled from the water that day. Bloody river water had gotten into his lungs and he developed pneumonia."

Jack was puzzled by the man who was talking to him. There was a strong intelligence there and he had knowledge of Jack's life that he didn't even know about, himself. "Mudder, who are you? I'm guessin' you're the lieutenant who saved me long ago, but who are you?"

"My given name is Samuel Mayfield. Grew up along the river in Kentucky. My dad was an engineer who designed boilers and steam-drive systems for the Delaware Steamboat Company. I used to follow him to the construction yard to watch them buildin' the big steamers. On one visit the engineers needed to inspect a seam inside a mud drum of a boiler. I told my dad I could fit into the small hole, and he allowed me to crawl inside to look at the damaged steel plates and tell them what I saw. When I came outta the drum I was covered in river mud, so they called me Mudder, and it stuck because the men who worked with my dad called me that name ever since that day. I went to college in Louisville, and when the war came along I got a commission in the army. Three years later this happened when I ran across you bleedin' in the river."

Jack paused for a moment to take in his story. "That tells me who you are, but still, how can you remember me and Bourdon after all these years?"

Chuck Clegg

"I was both blessed and cursed with a memory where I can see things exactly as I saw them, even if they happened years ago. I can still see the damaged rivets in the mud drum from when I was a boy. The gift of perfect memory made an engineering career seem easy. Unfortunately, that same perfect memory makes relivin' the nightmare of Buffington a constant memory. After the war I drifted for a while. I should've died in the hospital, and I prayed to die many times after that. Eventually I ended up here in Wheeling. As a one-armed man, I picked up odd jobs around the south end, most at the small machine shops. I told a shop foreman one day how to solve a problem with molds crackin' in the foundry. He soon recognized I had some skills he needed to improve his operations and started paying me for my input. After a while, I started savin' the money he paid me and eventually started loanin' money to them that needed it. O' course I charged a small fee for using my money. Over time I started to build my empire in the south end." He took his hand and waved it around the room as if to show Jack his kingdom. "And the rest is history, as they say."

"Well, that tells me about you and how you know me, but what about Bourdon?" Jack asked.

"After his fever broke, they moved him to the federal prison in Columbus. I heard later that he and several others escaped along with General John Morgan, the man who led the raid across Ohio. Morgan was killed later in the war. Didn't know what happened to

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the captain until I run into him some years back here in Wheeling. He didn't remember me, I guess due to his fever from back then."

"In my line of work, supposed respectable businessmen occasionally need services that I can provide with no questions asked. Bourdon came to me a couple o' times needin' things to happen. He paid well for my assistance in those jobs. Mostly insurance-fraud type things. I got to watchin' what he was askin' to have done by my associates. It wasn't stealin' shipments of farm goods and such. It was stealin' information and new industrial equipment. I got to checkin' around and found out he was shippin' this information and equipment south to an investment company. That company is a front for the Order of Southern Liberty. I want no part of that twisted dream of those powerful businessmen from the past and their confederate plans."

Jack had found out a great deal of information about Mudder and Bourdon, but still nothing about the Boston and her watery fate. "What's the story with the Boston and Bourdon's interest beyond the insurance money?"

"He's not interested in the money; he's interested in what she was carryin' downriver. Last month a Pittsburgh warehouse was broken into and ten crates were removed. Two security guards were killed in the robbery. The office was ransacked, and the documents meant to accompany the crates were removed. Two nights later at a small chemical storage site, a second robbery took place of a new

compound that produces a gas that will revolutionize portable lamps. A few things in the office, along with the research files, were taken.”

Jack quickly asked, “Was it Bourdon?”

“Not him in person, but it was his men. The *Miss Boston* was at a private wharf just above the Point and left the morning after the second robbery.”

“What was in the crates and kegs?”

“Don’t know for sure. Do know there are rumors of a new nail machine that’s been in development and was supposed to be shipped to Wheeling soon. The rumors say it uses a continuous wire feed principle to make the new type of nails. Ten strands o’ wire are fed into the machine at one time, and it manufactures nails at ten times the rate of the old machines. Takes hundreds of men to manufacture nails in the cut mills today. If that machine works like they say it should, it’ll make whoever owns that technology a very rich man. Ten machines that operate like they say can possibly make the same amount of nails as nearly a thousand hand-operated nail presses now in service. That’s nearly the number of machines now producing nails in the entire Wheeling area. With those machines in production somewhere else, and the information on how to build more, someone could quickly corner the market in this country, maybe even corner the world’s market. Most likely take a couple years to redo the engineerin’ design work and put the machines in service here. Bourdon’s friends could cut costs and undercut Wheeling’s lock on nail production worldwide. Most likely they’d never recover.”

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“What about the wooden kegs?”

“They came from Canada to a university in Pittsburgh that studies new technology. It said a big chemical manufacturer wants to buy the process and patent the discovery. But they wanted further research to make it safe to use in lamps. All I do know is that when you expose the chemical to small amounts of water it causes a chemical reaction to produce a gas that burns a bright flame for light.”

“That must be why the Boston exploded underwater,” Jack told Mudder.

“Then the Boston and all of her cargo are gone?” Mudder asked.

Jack hesitated before he answered. Mudder had been honest with him, but still he was a businessman on the bottom end of society. He may not like Bourdon, but if these new machines could be recovered the man who had them could be rich. “Well... I’m...”

Mudder stopped him with a bit of a grin. “Best I don’t know. Could get to drinkin’ and say somethin’ I shouldn’t. Ya never know about an old cripple like me. But, if a man needed to find somethin’ on the bottom of the river, he’d need some help. Best man on the river for that is a feller named Jeremiah Adams. I hear tell he works at the Davis Dam just below Pittsburgh.”

Jack asked, “What’s so special about Jeremiah Adams that maybe I need his help?”

“He works underwater, and he has some fancy degree in geology. He did the study on the land before they built that new dam on the

Ohio River. They say he studies the bedrocks and river bottom in the area before construction's started. After that dam was complete, it raised the river level over six feet. Boats in the Pittsburgh area don't have to worry about low water in the dry season. Coal can now be shipped to the steel plants around the area without low water interruption. Adams signed on after the dam was complete to study how the dam will alter the river bottom long-term. The government plans to build more dams downriver. His bottom studies will help future construction." Mudder paused and took a drink before continuing. "Adams has some sort of metal contraption he puts on his head so he can breathe while workin' underwater. A feller on top works a bellows pump and pushes air down to him. They say he can stay underwater for hours. If a man had need of an underwater feller, he'd be the one I'd ask. I'm not the only one who figures he's spent so much time underwater he's part frog or fish. Some even go so far as to say he's a cross between a man and a frog—a real-life frogman."

About then, the front door opened and the light of day shone into the smoke-filled room. The light revealed just how much smoke was inside the tavern. The man who came in went straight to Mudder and whispered something in his ear. Mudder looked at the man and asked, "When?" The man answered, "Just a little while ago."

"Bourdon's cuttin' his losses and any ties to him. The captain and one of the missing crew members of the Boston were just found dead over in the weeds along the river. The one feller was the sick

crewman they took off the boat; some said he had the fever. Sounds like he and the captain both ended up with the lead poisonin'. Bourdon's cleanin' up loose ends, and Dulin, you're a loose end. When he finds out the information he wants, he'll try and tie up your loose end as well."

"Others have tried, but so far I'm a knot they haven't been able to tie up." Jack sat back looking smug.

"If Bourdon can't get to you, he'll find some other way to get to ya'. Tied your boat behind Tilley's, didn't' ya?"

"How'd you know that?"

"I make my livin' sellin' information along with a few other things. Tilley's a respectable woman, in my book. Just wouldn't want anythin' to happen to her or any of her lady friends. Understand?"

Jack knew what Mudder meant. "I understand. Anything else?"

"Dulin, if a man were to find those crates he'd have to have lots o' money to put 'em into service or return 'em to the rightful owners and collect a handsome finder's fee. I'd bet it'd be enough money that'd keep your boat in good shape for many years to come; that is, if you had anythin' to return to the rightful owners and if Bourdon don't kill you first."

Jack poured another drink for Mudder and refilled his own glass. He looked at the bottle they'd emptied. "We've drunk all your whiskey."

Mudder said, "Well, it's time for you to go, then." The two men drank the shots and set the glasses down hard on the table.

"Mudder, I owe you for this information."

Mudder sat back and once again a stone-cold appearance returned to his broad face. "You owe me nothin'. I don't like that SOB Bourdon—not thirty-five years ago, not today."

Jack stuck his hand out to Mudder, "Then I owe my deepest thanks to the officer who saved my life that day at Buffington Island."

Mudder raised his left hand to Jack, and the two men shook hands and closed a long overdue debt. "Oh, by the way Dulin, tell your friend over at the bar I really do have people that would kill 'im if I said. They'd also fry 'im up and feed 'im to their relatives if I said to."

Jack laughed, and the two men smiled at each other as Jack turned and walked over to the bar to retrieve Billy. "What the hell'd you talk about for so long?" Billy asked.

Jack opened the door for Billy and only said as they went out into the daylight, "I'll tell you later. Right now, we're goin' t' Pittsburgh."

Chapter 9

The Visitors

It was going on near four o'clock by the time the two made it back to the trolley turnaround. They sat down on the bench to wait for the next car. Jack was still processing the information Mudder had given him.

"Jack, what'd he tell you?"

Jack didn't flinch and stared straight forward in response to Billy's question. "Said he could kill us both if he wanted, and he had men who'd fry us up and feed us t' their relatives if he wanted."

Billy sat back puzzled, "What the hell are you talkin' about?"

"Never mind. We're goin' t' the Davis Dam below Pittsburgh and find a guy named Jeremiah. He's one o' them fellers who works underwater with an apparatus like we seen a couple years back when the Allegheny sunk. You remember. That insurance company brought in those men with them bell-shaped buckets on their heads, and they had them little barrels on their backs, and air was bein' pumped into those little barrels. They went below the water and attached lifting lines to the wreck."

Billy nodded, indicating he remembered. "Yeah, I remember those fools who put those buckets on their heads with the windows in 'em so they could see. Any man who's ever went a foot or two

down knows you can't see nothing but green water. No, sir, couldn't get me to do that for no amount o' money."

The sound of the trolley coming got the men's attention as it moved toward the turnaround point. Billy turned quick to Jack, "Whatta we need with an underwater man anyhow?"

"We're goin' after the Boston," Jack said as he waited to step up to the trolley.

"All aboard! Hands and feet inside the car!" Jack put the coins into the receiver, and they made a distinct sound as they dropped in the change compartment. Lead slugs or bottle caps wouldn't sound the same, and the trolley operator would know. The two men sat down and began the ride back uptown.

The main part of town wasn't as busy this time of day. Delivery wagons and people shopping had gone home for the evening and the ice chunks had long evaporated on the hot brick streets. In the distance, two men moved a cart along the street. Two men with shovels were collecting the droppings of horses and mules left in the street.

The hum of the motor slowed and the car came to a stop. "Watch your step, please," the trolley man said to those departing at this stop. This operator seemed more human than the one this morning.

Jack and Billy stepped down onto the red bricks to cross the street that went up the hill to Brother-in-law's house. On the far corner, two men in dark suits and small round hats stood watching

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their approach. Jack nudged Billy's side and used his head to direct his attention to the two men standing across the street. Jack slowed his pace as the men were now coming toward them.

"You Jack Dulin?" the bigger of the two men asked.

"And why would you be askin' that?" Jack looked directly into the big man's eyes.

"Mr. Bourdon would like to talk with you." The man pointed across the street to an alley that divided the block. A closed carriage with two coal-black horses stood just visible in the narrow alley.

Jack thought for a moment. He didn't want to get both him and Billy in that tight alley alone. The streets at that time of day had few people moving around, and in that out-of-the-way place a man could get himself into trouble. Best have someone watching your back, even if you couldn't see him. "I'll see Mr. Bourdon, but my friend waits here. He's a bit skittish in tight places," Jack told the two men.

Neither of the men said anything about Jack's statement. They simply motioned in the direction they wanted Jack to go. For the second time today, Billy was left behind while Jack went into an unknown situation. Last time at least Billy had a beer to drink and a stool to sit on while waiting. Billy moved up the street a few steps until he could look directly into the alley and leaned against the building. The bricks had absorbed the heat of the afternoon sun and were warm on Billy's back as he watched Jack go into the distant alley.

The smaller of the two men stepped up to the side of the carriage and opened the door for Jack. Neither man had shown any obvious facial expressions over the last couple of minutes.

“Mr. Dulin, please step in.” Jack could hear the voice from inside, but couldn’t yet see the man there. It was an uncomfortable feeling, meeting the man who shot him so long ago. His voice was calm, but still, after many years in the north, he had a distinct southern accent. Jack could smell French perfume, the kind Sarah was now wearing.

Jack climbed into the carriage and the man inside moved a sliding panel in the roof allowing the outside light into the carriage. Jack’s eyes quickly adjusted to the light from the window in the roof, and across from him he saw a distinguished looking man in a gray suit with a dark vest inside his tailored jacket. His shirt was most likely fine silk shipped from the Orient. A gold chain hung from his watch pocket and ran to the opposite side under his coat. His small neatly trimmed beard contained a touch of gray. His hair was also neatly trimmed and salt-and-pepper in color. His hands rested on a cane with a gold crest on the top. Everything about him said ‘gentleman.’ But Jack still remembered those eyes from years ago in the blood-stained river as the man now across from him had raised his pistol and fired. That painful memory shot through Jack’s mind. He wondered for a moment, “Does he remember me?”

Sitting beside Bourdon was a young lady in a fine white dress trimmed in light blue lace. Her hair was dark, but Jack could tell it

had a hint of red as the light shone upon it inside the carriage. A small hat sat on her head, centered and slightly tipped to the front. She was much younger than Bourdon, perhaps his daughter or perhaps not.

“Mr. Dulin, I am Charles Bourdon, owner of the steamboat *Miss Boston*. I’m sure you know the boat of which I speak.”

Jack hesitated for a moment, still remembering the face from that day in the war. The young lady sitting beside Bourdon broke the momentary silence. “My dear, would you please introduce me to Mr. Dulin.”

“Why, my dear, this is the man who salvaged that experimental steamboat, the *Bentley*, downriver. Jack, I am sure you realize a great many of my friends lost money on that pipe dream of William Jones’s. And when the insurance company failed to pay off the loss of the boat, their money was gone just like the *Bentley* was.”

Jack realized that Bourdon didn’t recognize him from the battle in the river long ago. “The *Bentley* was salvaged fair and legal by me. I owe no one anythin’ on that lost boat. And now she’s called the *Mary E*. My boat.”

Bourdon raised one hand from the end of the cane in a gesture for Jack to wait a moment before continuing, “No, Mr. Dulin, I admire a man who knows what he wants and goes after it. None of my colleagues or the insurance company had the desire or courage to try what you did to salvage the...well as you now call her...the *Mary E*. I find it refreshing to find a man of courage along the river.”

Jack paused for a moment as the two men assessed what came next. Jack looked at the lady who was sitting smiling at him. “Ma’am, that’s a pleasant perfume I presume you are wearing.”

She smiled coyly and said, “My love Charles has it shipped all the way from Paris for me.”

“Don’t suppose a riverboat man like me could buy a bottle o’ that stuff for his best girl, could he?” Jack almost played the role of backwater river man too well.

Bourdon placed his hand back on his cane as he answered Jack’s question. “Strange you should ask, Mr. Dulin. I recently had a shipment of this fine perfume lost downriver. And speaking of that loss brings me to the main subject of our meeting today.”

Jack realized Bourdon knew about his involvement in the Boston’s loss. “Mr. Dulin, I lost the Boston, and I have come to believe you can help me find her. You most likely salvaged much of the cargo on board before she went down. Some say you’re a pirate. Not me. I say you’re a man who goes after what he wants when it presents itself to him. The whiskey and cigars and anything else you may have found on the Boston are covered by my insurance carrier for loss and are of little consequence to me. Even the shipment of perfume to friends downriver can easily be replaced in a month or two. But the Boston carried some items not covered on the insurance manifest. I assure you, a slight oversight on the part of my warehouse manager in Pittsburgh—or I should say former manager. I tolerate no lack of diligence in protecting my merchandise.”

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Jack looked at Bourdon as he sat quietly. "What makes you think I know anythin' o' your boat's loss—you did say it was the Boston?"

Bourdon's facial expression changed to a stern appearance. "Don't play games with me, Dulin. I know you were on board the Boston and salvaged some of her cargo. I want to know where she went down. I need to retrieve some important items for my colleagues. The crates on board contain one-of-a-kind items. You were aboard her, and I want to know where she's located." By now the genteel southern accent was close to a field hand's tone of voice with wanting what was his.

"She's gone in a million pieces downriver. Blown into bits of floating debris. Should be about Pomeroy, Ohio, by now." Jack sat back and grinned. "You do know where Pomeroy is, don't you Mr. Bourdon?"

Bourdon froze at the words Jack had just said to him and stared at the man sitting across from him. Jack's face showed a little smile of satisfaction at pissing off Bourdon. He sensed that Bourdon was now off his game and felt there was something strange about the comment Jack had just made. "Of course I know where Pomeroy is. Any man who has traveled the river knows where it is. Besides, what's that got to do with the Boston, and what do you mean 'a million pieces?'"

Jack felt he had Bourdon playing his game. Bourdon thought he had the answers but found out he didn't. "Since you obviously know I salvaged the Boston, then you should know what cargo she was

carryin' that exploded. Not an explosion like anythin' I've ever seen, but somethin' totally different, an underwater explosion. A fire an' explosion that damn near killed me an' my crew. Your steamer's gone to hell in millions o' pieces." Jack sat forward quickly and placed his hands on top of Bourdon's fancy cane and stared him in the eyes. Both men stiffened at the sudden change in events.

The young lady realized things were quickly getting out of hand. "Gentleman, let's..."

Bourdon looked at her with his steely eyes. "Shut up; you're here to look pretty and nothing else, so don't open your mouth again." Jack saw fear in the lady's face as she turned and looked straight forward in the carriage.

Bourdon slowly sat back and stared at Jack who was also sitting back in the seat. Bourdon began, "Mr. Dulin... Can I call you Jack?"

Jack was quick to answer, "No."

"All right then, Mr. Dulin. I represent a group of investors who, let's just say 'appropriate' new industrial technology."

"By 'appropriate' don't you mean steal?" Jack quickly asked.

"Mr. Dulin, as I was saying, I represent a group of investors who appropriate new technology that's about to come on the market. The Boston was carrying such a cargo. Not long ago a dry compound was developed in Canada that could revolutionize lighting on mobile equipment. Just think about the possibility of a substance that would allow men to carry light into mines and on board boats to light their

darkness... The substance is called calcium carbide. It was being shipped to a research institute in Pittsburgh for further research. Major chemical companies are interested in patenting the material and then beginning to manufacture the new compound. Let's just say my partners and I saw the opportunity to obtain a couple dozen wooden containers of this material, along with the documentation to manufacture it at one of our southern chemical sites. Each box was dipped in beeswax to prevent any moisture from entering the containers during shipment. It is most likely your clumsy salvage efforts damaged a container of the material. It releases an explosive gas when exposed to water. In practical use a very controlled amount of water is introduced to produce a gas that can provide a controlled light. Your bumbling must have caused the release of a large amount of gas, which you somehow managed to ignite. The results of your ignorance cost me and my associates greatly, Mr. Dulin."

"Well, I didn't try and arrange to pirate my own boat, Bourdon." Jack said sharply.

Bourdon's eyes flashed with hatred as he grabbed Jack's arm, "You listen to me you two-bit river scum! That boat would be fine if you'd left her alone. My associates were on their way with a boat and equipment to save the cargo. As to why she ran aground is none of your business, but because your part in all of this is insignificant, I'll tell you this much—if that stupid captain would have stayed out of the whiskey bottle, the Boston would have made it to Muskingum City. But he and a couple crewmen decided to go into business for

themselves and ran her aground to salvage the cargo. A mistake that none of them will ever make again.”

Jack grabbed Bourdon’s arm and lifted it off of his. “Get your hand off me. You and your southern friends lost the chance to be anythin’ more than a joke, years ago. Your efforts now won’t change a thing. When that boat exploded, your dream of a separate country was lost, and your Johnny Reb ideas should go with it.”

Bourdon regained his composure. “That fool politician Jefferson Davis and Lee’s great army thought together they could win the war by sheer southern pride. Those of us who saw the real vision knew without our own industrial strength the cause would be lost, due to the north’s industry base. You can’t fight a war with bales of cotton and tobacco. Products made from iron and steel, and now the new age of chemicals, are what give a nation its strength. The big industrial giants in the north are only interested in making money for themselves and their stockholders. We in the south will take from them the knowledge to build, not personal wealth, but the wealth of a new nation under our own flag. We’ll not make the same mistake this time as they did thirty years ago. And you and your kind will be swatted away just like a bunch of dog-pecker gnats. You’re all weak, greedy, and narrow-minded. By the time the north realizes what’s going on, it’ll be too late for them to do anything about it.”

Jack smiled at Bourdon. “You forget that I already know what you’re up to, and you won’t be able to stop yourself—you’ll continue to puff up and brag, to all those that’ll listen, of your grand plans.”

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“Dulin you’re nothing! Nobody! Besides, it’s already believed that you’re a pirate who steals from wrecked steamers that you most likely had a hand in running aground. Jack Dulin, I’ll win. I always win. I never bluff. I’m always dealt a pat hand and never bluff. I play every hand, and I win. I could have you and your friends disappear and sell your boat for salvage scrap, but I won’t. The authorities are looking for you, and when they find you, they’ll do something worse than kill you; they’ll put you in the prison at Moundsville and throw away the key. At night, in your small jail cell, you’ll hear the whistle of a steamboat passing on the river and realize you’ll never again captain a boat on the river.” Bourdon sat back and laughed out loud as he looked at Jack. He took the top of his cane and rapped on the side of the carriage.

The door opened. Jack began to step out of the carriage but paused for a moment, and looked close at Bourdon to give the impression he was examining him. The last rays of sunlight shining on his neck made it easier to see. Jack noticed that a long scar almost hidden by his starched white collar was now showing in the light. Jack gave it a hard stare and inquired, “How’d you get that scar on your neck, Charlie?”

Bourdon rubbed it with his hand and adjusted his collar so it couldn’t be seen. “I was tangled in my horse’s reins when I was a boy, and they cut into my neck. My father shot the prized horse because it hurt me. No one hurts me and gets away with it.”

Jack stepped the rest of the way out of the carriage and, before he stepped away, he turned and looked at Bourdon, who was still staring at him. "You know, Charlie, that looks more like a scar from where a man got tangled up in fence wire instead of pony reins." As Jack walked away, he heard a couple hard slaps and a woman's muffled cry from inside the carriage as it started away. He turned and watched it go down the alley. Jack watched and said out loud to himself, "Well, my dear, if you sleep with the devil you're gonna have to pay the price."

Jack looked across the street to where Billy sat nearly asleep on the steps to a lawyer's office. "Billy let's go."

Billy quickly jumped to his feet and rubbed his eyes. "I wasn't asleep, Jack. I was just shieldin' my eyes from the sun's glare."

Jack glanced back at Billy and pointed as he said, "The sun from where you're sittin' disappeared a few minutes ago behind that building."

Billy shrugged and smiled as they headed up the hill to Brother-in-law's house. The two men came up to the house that was now quiet as it sat in the evening light. The last few minutes of golden glowing sunlight made the house look warm and pleasant as they approached. The dark coal ash that stained the clapboard siding was lost in the soft late-day shadows.

The two men ran up the steps and called to Brother-in-law and Sarah as they entered the house. No answer came back. They walked into the house where the smell of fresh coffee lingered in the

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air. Sarah's new perfume was barely noticeable through the coffee smell. Billy called out to his sister and still no answer came. The two men grew worried and looked at each other. Then from out back came the sound of a dog barking.

Jack looked at Billy, "That's the boy's dog."

The two men made their way to the small backyard toward the sound. As they came to the screen door and looked out, a sense of relief flooded over them when they saw Brother-in-law and Sarah sitting in the swing. Oddly though, sitting in a couple wicker chairs were two men in suits with their hats resting in their laps. All had a cup of Sarah's coffee in hand as they spoke to each other. The big yellor dog and Joshua were playing nearby.

"What's goin' on here?" Billy called out as they stepped from the house into the yard.

Sarah looked at Jack and said, "These two men wish to speak with you."

For the third time today Jack was going to have a conversation with men he had never formally met before. Billy turned to Jack, "You want me to go sit on the curb while you talk with these two gentlemen?" Jack shook his head no and patted Billy on the shoulder.

"What can I do for you gentleman?"

Sarah stood up before they could answer, "If you gentlemen would excuse me, I need to be gettin' supper ready. Joshua, bring

Sunny and come in the house.” The three disappeared through the back door.

“Jack Dulin, I’m D.B. Cecil, president of the First Bank of Pittsburgh. We’re the insurance underwriters for the steamboat Miss Boston, and this gentleman with me is Henry Booth, head of the private investigating firm of Booth and Henderson. We’re investigating the sinking of the Boston.”

Jack stood up as if he were going to flee from the two men. Bourdon had already told him the authorities believed he was a pirate and had grounded the Boston.

“No, Mr. Dulin, please sit. We only want to talk with you about the boat. We already know what happened from conversations with the sick crewman of the Boston and the friend you call Brother-in-law. We know what your involvement is to this point—but only we know—the local authorities are unaware. We need your help to recover what was on the Boston when she sank.”

Jack looked at Brother-in-law and said, “Didn’t I tell you not to talk to anyone about the Boston?”

Brother-in-law thought for only a moment before saying, “Sarah made me tell them what I knew. She didn’t want me to get into any more trouble. Besides, now we have help solving this.”

Jack looked at the two men, “If you’ve heard what Brother-in-law and the sick crewman from the Boston told you, what more do you want from me? You know we have no involvement in what happened to the Boston.”

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Brother-in-law cleared his throat, "Jack, you remember this mornin' when you asked Sarah and the boy to find out about the man who went off the bridge? Well they did. It was the crewman from the Boston—the man I swam to shore with before he disappeared into the weeds."

The private investigator Booth looked at Jack, "So you see, Jack, you need us as much as we need you. The only witness who confirms your story, other than the man you refer to as Brother-in-law, is dead. A jury is not likely to believe a river salvager like you—someone who the newspapers are already saying may be an unnamed pirate on the Ohio River."

Jack sat back in his chair and felt lost for a moment. He turned and looked hard at Billy. "Billy, if your brother-in-law ever comes calling at your door again, I don't want to know about it."

Jack's curiosity took over as he looked at the men in suits. "There's somethin' I'm wonderin' about. How'd you guys come to know so much before you even talked with Brother-in-law? I can't think of any way you could've known about us before talkin' with Brother-in-law. But, somehow, you knew to come here. How?"

"The steamer Rockington passed your boat near Moundsville with two of our investigators on board. They were heading to Muskingum City to check out the Southern Investment Company. We know they had a hand in the theft of some private industrial machines that were stolen, and a couple guards were murdered. When they saw the debris field floating down the river, they figured

she must have exploded upriver. They remembered your single-stack boat going north, and they just put two and two together. When they got to Muskingum City they telegraphed our Wheeling office, and we waited for you to arrive. It wasn't hard to find your boat when we knew what we were looking for and the wharf master remembered one of your crew had a sister here in town—and the rest you probably know."

Cecil removed a paper from his inside pocket and showed it to Jack. "Mr. Dulin, we believe the Boston had on board ten crates we also have underwritten for a business here in Wheeling. I told you they were stolen and two men were killed. They are invaluable in their cost, and being able to replace them would be difficult. I'm more interested in their recovery than with the loss of the steamer. So you can see by figuring out whose single-stack boat salvaged the Boston's wreck, it has led us to you and, hopefully, you'll lead us to those crates."

Jack looked at Billy. "We're going to cut off that damn single-stack and affix a twin-stack to it. I'm tired of people being able to identify us by that stupid stack. This ain't our day. Mudder's gonna kill and eat us. Bourdon's gonna smash us like a couple dog-pecker gnats. And, some banker needs our help. What's next?"

Sarah came to the screen door and said, "Jack, someone's here to see you.

It was Ell. She stepped out on the back porch and smiled at Jack. "I have a message from Tilley."

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Jack got up from the chair and made his way over to Ell. Together, they walked toward the side of the porch. "Jack, there's been police and sheriff's deputies askin' questions this mornin'. Tilley wanted you to know. And, Jack, they have an officer on your boat guardin' against your return."

Jack made a face and looked at Ell. "I had to ask what was next, and you bring it to me." Ell looked puzzled at Jack's statement. "Never mind. Anything else?" Jack asked.

"Yes. At just before dark, Tilley's gonna send one of the girls to encourage the deputy to come in the house for supper. You know, the one that's guardin' your boat. She figured maybe you could slip in and untie the Mary E and let her drift out into the main river current while you get up the steam pressure. She figures we can stall the deputy for at least an hour before he returns to find your boat gone. In the dark you should have enough time to get steam up and move downriver to safety until this blows over."

Jack took her hands and held them in his. Ell looked at the injuries to the palms of his hands. She looked up at him and smiled. "They've already begun to heal."

Jack returned with Ell to where the two men were sitting. "Well you were right. The authorities are lookin' for us and they've found my boat."

D.B. Cecil stood up and faced Jack. "We can help, but we need your help to try to find and recover the ten crates on the Boston. It's important that we recover them if there's any way possible. There

will be a nice finder's fee of fifty-thousand dollars, and we'll help clear you and your crew—totally clear your names.”

Jack looked at the two men, “What about Bourdon and his Southern Investors Company?”

The detective said, “Don't you mean the OSL?”

“Yeah, they don't play by the rules and have no problems with killin' and things like that.”

“I guess we'll cross that bridge when we come to it.”

Jack looked at the two men. “Don't forget the last man who crossed that bridge with Bourdon's help ended up taking a dive into the river off the suspension bridge.”

Cecil asked Jack, “Do you have a plan?”

“I might, and that's a very big might. If those machines are still in one piece, we'll have to find them at the bottom of the river and that ain't gonna be easy. And if Bourdon and his rebel friends have any idea they survived the explosion, they're gonna be lookin', too.”

“If we can do anything, let us know and we'll try to help,” Cecil told Jack.

Jack thought for a moment and said, “Yeah, there is. Spread the word that another crewman survived and is in hidin' somewhere in Moundsville, waitin' to give testimony about what happened on the Boston at the insurance inquest. Just say he knows what caused the explosion and where the Boston sank. The lost crewman also knows what she carried downriver from Pittsburgh—what wasn't on the cargo manifest. That should help to keep Bourdon's attention while

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we go after the Boston. It should also keep the local authorities guessin' as to what's goin' on. My crew and I are gonna make a trip to pick up a frogman. Don't ask. It'll be better this way." Jack thought for a moment before asking, "If we're successful and need your help, how do I get ahold of you?"

D.B. answered, "We'll be in the River Front Hotel just above the wharf in the presidential suite until we hear from you. There will be an inquest within the next week or two about the Boston's loss. The possibility of getting information from the 'surviving' crewman in Moundsville may delay the hearing until he can be found. And, that could be awhile since there really is no missing crewmember after the accident."

Jack gave the man a puzzled look, "Accident?"

"For now, we'll call it an accident. What we already know, combined with your possible discovery, may shed more light into the wreck's cause and, don't forget, clear your names."

Jack stepped close to the two men who placed their hats on. "If I find your machines at the bottom of the river it's gonna cost you seventy-five thousand dollars. Our asses are on the line, and it'll take me gettin' some help and equipment to pull this off. Fifty thousand ain't enough."

D.B. Cecil adjusted his hat, stood up straight, and looked Jack in the eye. "Mr. Dulin, you find our merchandise and leave no loose ends. You'll get your seventy-five thousand, and our law service will

clear your names. That's the deal. Now, go find my damn machines."

The two men excused themselves as they made their way through the house and left to return downtown. Billy and Brother-in-law joined Jack, along with Ell, now sitting in the backyard. "What's next, Jack?" the pair asked.

Chapter 10

The Escape

The evening sun had disappeared behind the hills to the west. The cool air of the evening was a welcome guest in the small backyard where the crew of the Mary E sat talking. Jack explained, as the last light faded, what he had learned from his encounters with Mudder and Bourdon earlier that day. He wanted everyone to understand they were dealing with a man who not only had twisted ideas, but a secret organization with plans of raising the lost dreams of the South. And this time they intend not to let anyone stand in the way of a new nation built on industrial might instead of cotton and tobacco.

Jack laid out his plan. "After dark we'll make our way back to the island and onto the boat. Ell will go ahead and let Tilley know we're ready to go aboard the Mary E. She'll have one of her girls distract the deputy so we can board the boat."

Billy sat listening to Jack's plan before he pointed out the obvious. "Jack, first off, if someone's lookin' for us and knows we're in town they'll be on the far side of the bridge. They probably know our boat's in the back channel and that we'll have to cross the bridge to get back to 'er. Second, it'll take at least an hour for the firebox to heat the boiler enough to get steam for the engine. That's even usin' the bellows to force air into the bed o' coals. That deputy may be a

fool for a while but sooner or later he's gonna get suspicious. And with no steam and the boat adrift, who knows how far downriver we could end up? Hell, that boat might drift into shore somewhere downriver, then what? It weighs near eighty tons, and we just can't get out and push."

Jack thought for a moment and looked at Ell then calmly said, "Would you like to go for a boat ride upriver?"

Ell never hesitated, "Can you teach me to pilot the Mary E?"

"By the time we get to the Davis Dam, you'll know all there is to bein' a riverboat pilot." Jack smiled as he answered.

"Jack, you didn't answer my question." Billy was tired and wanted to leave town before he went to jail, and here Jack was discussing piloting his boat with a woman. "Jack, did you hear me?"

"Yes, Billy, I heard you. We'll let 'er drift out into the main river from the back channel. As soon as we hit the river current, it'll turn our stern downriver because of the rudders against the current. Once we have our bow pointin' north we'll drop our drag anchor. It should catch in the soft mud of the bottom. By then we should be away from shore far enough no one should see us in the dark. I just hope no steamers are tryin' to run the river at night. Can't use the bellows on the boiler fire; or we'll be blowin' hot sparks out the stack and that could draw attention to us. We'll start the fires and let the pressure come up to a hundred pounds, just enough to let us get underway to move upriver above the city. When the lights of the

bridge fade behind us, we'll stoke the fire and work the bellows to feed the flames while headin' north before daylight."

Brother-in-law had sat listening to Jack and Billy's conversation about escaping Wheeling before asking a question. "Are we goin' to a carnival sideshow upriver somewhere?"

Everyone looked at Brother-in-law strangely. "Why do ask somethin' like that?" Jack asked.

"Well, you told them two fellers that were here earlier that you were goin' after a frogman. Seen a wolf man and a bearded lady in the sideshow one time but never seen a froggy man." Brother-in-law had a puzzled look on his face.

Billy paused for a moment before asking, "Yeah, Jack, what the hell do you mean about goin' lookin' for a frogman?"

Jack stood up and walked up onto the porch and looked over the fence that closed the backside of the yard from the alley. Being assured it was clear and no one was there, he walked back over to where the group was sitting. "Remember, the Boston broke in half just before the front section rolled under us and exploded. The rear section behind the stacks stayed upright and was bottom-walkin' on her paddles downriver. By the location on the boat where Brother-in-law described those ten crates were located, they should be just behind where the main boilers were. If they were made fast to the cargo rings and held down so as not to move around durin' the trip, they should still be just inside the midsection of the Boston. I think the back section rolled along the bottom and most likely ended up

coming to a rest against the bank in the first bend of the river at a place called the Wells Bend. In that bend, the river runs into a sheer rock face that drops straight down to the river bottom. The river's current has washed out the soft sediment, and it has a gravel bottom. Years back, when I worked that snag puller, we sounded the water depth and it's near fifty to sixty feet deep there—one o' the deepest places on the river because o' the rock wall in the turn o' the river. If the stern o' the Boston came to rest against that rock face, she'll still be there along with her cargo."

Billy was upset at Jack's plan. "Jack, that's fifty feet! A man can't hold his breath long enough t' swim down, find those crates, and rig 'em t' be hoisted aboard, even if he is a frogman! What the hell did you and Mudder drink this afternoon that made you crazy? We'd better just slip downriver to Cincinnati until this whole thing blows over. No man can salvage a boat that deep."

"We need a frogman," Jack said with a smile.

Billy was flat-out angry with Jack. "Jack, it ain't just your ass, it's all of us that're goin' t' prison if we're charged with piratin' the Boston." Billy walked over to Jack and in a reasoning tone of voice said, "We'll make like we tried to find 'er and say she was completely destroyed in the explosion. Tell that D.B. or whatever 'is name is, and hope he c'n get us outta this mess. Or we could head downriver. I don't care which, but I ain't goin' t' no sideshow for a froggy man to help keep us from goin' t' prison."

Jack sat down for a moment before he began. "Billy, we're not goin' after a froggy man in a sideshow act. We're goin' after a guy who works at the Davis Dam below Pittsburgh. He's one of those fellers like we seen a couple o' years ago on that big salvage operation downriver. He wears a metal device on his head with air pumped down to him from a push bellows. I guess it's somethin' like the one we have for the boiler. Accordin' to Mudder, he can work in deep water to study the river bottom. If he c'n do that, then he's just the guy we need t' help salvage the Boston. If she come to rest where I think she did, he c'n get down there." Jack stood up. "It's gettin' dark; we need to make our way across town to the bridge and then to Tilley's."

Billy quickly pointed out, "What if there's someone on the bridge lookin' for us?"

"Joshua and Ell c'n go across and signal us if it's clear. If not, we'll have a long swim ahead of us." Jack grinned as he patted Billy on the shoulder.

In the small kitchen, the gaslight gave the room a flickering yellow cast. Sarah had made sandwiches and a tin of coffee for the men to take with them. She was avoiding looking Brother-in-law direct in the eyes hoping to prevent crying. She realized this trip was different and dangerous for the men. She turned and handed the bag and the can of coffee to her husband, "Delmar, if you go and get yourself killed, I'll never forgive you. I'll cut off your other ear, so when the Good Lord calls your name you may not hear Him." She

smiled and hugged the one-eared man. Next she turned to Billy and Jack. "You two, best you be hearin' from me that you keep 'im safe and bring 'im back in good order." She looked at Jack straight in the eyes. "Jack, that boy? Are you gonna take him with you?"

Jack put his hand on Sarah's shoulder. "Yep, he's chosen to make his way in the world on his own, and on this trip he'll earn his keep. Besides, I'll take care of him and that brother and husband of yours, too. Closest thing I got to family, no way I'll let anythin' happen to 'em."

Everyone hugged and said goodbye in the small kitchen. Jack told them, "Wait here 'til I see if the coast is clear." He looked through the screen door out into the quiet street. He saw no one moving about. He opened the door and said, "Let's go." The three men, along with the boy and his dog, made their way down the steps. Ell and Sarah talked for a minute before Ell joined them on the street.

The bricks in the street and high stone building still held the heat of day. The group could feel the heat radiating from around them as they made their way downtown and toward the bridge. Jack looked at the far end and couldn't see anyone. "Ell, you and the boy make your way to the far side; look for strangers watchin' the approach to the bridge. If it's clear, walk to the center of the roadway and wave your arms. I'll be watchin' from here."

Ell and the boy, along with his dog, started across the long bridge. It seemed to take forever for the three to cross to the far

side. When they reached the island side they disappeared down the far approach. Jack stood and watched for a signal. "Where the devil did she go? I told her t' look around and signal me. I can't even see 'er." After what seemed like a long time the three reappeared in the middle of the roadway and waved that it was okay. The three men started off across the bridge toward the island.

Billy walked in the middle of the bridge, not wanting to look over the side, down to the dark waters far below. Jack stopped and looked to the south on the river first, and then toward the north. He said to the other two, "No boats anywhere right now and I don't see sparks from stacks anywhere near or far. River's quiet."

The three continued on with Billy looking down to the walkway below his feet, never looking over the side. It seemed to take forever, but finally the three made it to the far side and joined Ell and the boy. "Where'd you go? I thought for a while you forgot about us and the signal," Jack asked Ell.

"I saw someone movin' around down near the streetlight. You can still see him there." She pointed toward the distant lamppost. On the street bench near the light, someone had lain down to rest for the night. Most likely too much beer at the bar and no legs to get him home sober tonight.

Jack looked closely at the street as they started to make their way toward the boat. The group still had a distance to go until they reached Tilley's place on the far south end. Jack instructed Ell to go down Front Street and cross near the end. "If anyone's lookin' for

us, they won't think we'll come down the opposite side of the island." The small group of people finally made their way to the street that led across to Tilley's. Out front stood a man in a uniform leaning on the wrought iron fence; he appeared to be trying to stay awake.

"Ell, you and the boy go over and into the house. Not likely you two will raise any questions, especially with the boy and dog with you. When the police officer from in front of the house and the one from the boat come inside, move the light in the front room to the second window as a signal. We'll know it's clear, and we'll make for the boat. Watch from inside the house and, after we go through the side yard, make your way out through the basement and down to the boat."

Ell stood on her tiptoes and kissed Jack. Billy and Brother-in-law smiled and grinned. "Jack's got a girlfriend, Jack's got a girlfriend," Billy taunted Jack for a moment. Ell just smiled as she and the boy moved toward the house.

A half-hour must have passed before the policeman out front went inside. In a few minutes the light in the front room moved to the second window. The three men hurried along the street looking around as they went. Before long, they reached the top of the steps that led down to the boat. The dark night with no lights made it hard to see down the long set of steep steps. The Mary E was there in the back channel, but they could only see her dark silhouette against the few lights from the far side reflecting into the water behind her. They made their way down onto the shore next to the wharf.

Billy whispered, "Jack, can I turn on a lantern?"

"No," was the response.

Jack stood straining to see if Ell and the boy were coming from the house. His eyes had adjusted to the night darkness so he could at least see the shape of things around him. No sign of the two from the house. Jack went to the lower deck where Brother-in-law was waiting to release the shore lines. "If they don't come in a couple more minutes we'll have to go." He pulled out his pocket watch to see the time. He faced it toward the sky but, with no moonlight, he couldn't see the hands on the face.

Billy came out on deck to where the other two stood. "Jack, can I start the fire in the boiler?"

Jack hesitated for a second. "Wait one more minute and we're gonna release the shore lines and start t' drift down the channel." The three stood there not sayin' anything, each marking time in their heads. After a while, Jack said, "Let's free the shore line; we got to drift out of here before that policeman comes back."

Billy and Brother-in-law stepped to the dock and lifted the heavy ropes and pulled them on board. Jack could sense the current was beginning to move them slowly downstream. About then, he saw a movement at the top of the hill against the glow from the distant streetlight. Two people and a dog. They were coming. The three made their way down the steps and onto the wooden boards just as the stern section neared the end of the dock. They jumped aboard at the last possible second. The *Mary E* drifted quietly down the

channel toward the main river. The lights of Wheeling reflected on the dark waters in the river as the silent boat moved out into the channel.

As the boat drifted into the river's current, Jack was right. The unseen currents below the surface pushed the stern rudders to the south, and the boat's bow was now pointing north. Jack stood on the front of the boat and waited until they'd floated far out into the channel. He carefully looked to the north for any south-bound boat traffic. He instructed Brother-in-law to go back to the stern and look downriver for any sign of a boat coming north.

In a minute he returned and indicated no boats were seen. Jack pulled his drift anchor near the center of the boat's bow. The anchor was made from three pieces of heavy iron rod fashioned into the shape of hooks. The three were heated in a forge and were welded fast to form a type of grappling hook that was three feet long. Jack used it sometimes when he wanted to anchor in mid-river in soft bottoms. The downriver drift would pull the anchor's hooks into the bottom mud, and as long as the current wasn't heavy, it would hold the boat fast.

Jack tossed the homemade anchor over into the water off the bow and wrapped the heavy rope around the starboard keel. He'd like to have tied it to both forward keels but the port one had been torn off by the Boston. By tying to just the starboard keel, the boat would want to pull toward the port side in the slow moving current, putting a side strain on the anchor. If tied in the center, the

downriver current would split the bow equally and not pull to the side.

Jack watched the lights on shore and gauged his boat's drift downriver. It took nearly five minutes before he could tell the anchor had taken hold in mid-channel. He again looked north over the water to see if anything was coming south. Then he went topside and back toward the stern to look downriver. He watched carefully down the dark river.

Looking for a boat on the water at night is difficult even under the best of moonlit conditions, but on a dark night it's even harder. When you look downriver you can see distant lights from homes reflecting on the water. What Jack was looking for were dark places that seem to move and hide the light for a moment as it comes upstream. The dark silhouette of a boat may be all you see. After years on the river, Jack could look for the dark places that moved on the water—that meant a boat was coming. Jack saw nothing. The river was clear.

Jack went down to the main deck and into the boiler room. He opened and quickly shut the door so light wouldn't escape. The only light inside was from the open door to the firebox. Billy had stoked many a boiler and knew the science of a good bed of fire to start a boiler producing steam. Jack looked at the gauge; it hadn't yet moved. Billy looked at Jack, "Give it time. I told you it could take an hour or more t' get up enough steam to move the engine."

Jack understood. "Let me know when we can at least move upriver away from town; seventy-five pounds might be enough. I don't like sittin' mid-river like this." Billy nodded his head to signal he understood.

Jack quickly opened the door and stepped out onto the deck, into the darkness on the river. He stood for a moment letting his eyes adjust once again to the black night. On the far end of the island he could see two lanterns moving along the shore. He wondered if the men who carried those lanterns were looking for the *Mary E*. For now, she was just a dark spot in the river channel, and the men couldn't see this far out.

After a few moments Jack opened and closed his eyes to help adjust to the night. His clearing vision began to allow him the ability to walk on the deck toward the front of the boat. Brother-in-law came along the deck and told Jack he'd go to the engine room and help Billy. If he was needed he'd be there.

Jack moved onto the front of the boat. Not much to do until steam was up in the boiler. In the near darkness he could see Ell and Joshua sitting on coils of rope near the bow. He joined them, waiting for steam.

"Tilley asked if I was comin' back and I told her yes. I just wanna go on an adventure with you, Jack."

Jack hesitated for a moment before he answered, "It might prove t' be more than you bargained for. The authorities, along with Bourdon and the OSL, are all are lookin' for me. It could be a short

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trip if we're found out. Will Tilley get in trouble for helpin' us?" Jack asked.

"It's not likely she'll deny knowin' you, other than bein' an occasional payin' client. But Tilley knows lots of men who're occasional payin' clients. She pays no mind to their line o' work or politics or problems with the authorities."

Jack rubbed the head of the yeller dog that lay at his feet. "Joshua, don't you figure it's time you tell me what's your story?"

In the darkness, even being only a few feet away, faces were difficult to make out. Jack couldn't see what was in Joshua's face as he began to speak. "I come from Johnstown. My Dad was a foreman in the steel mill. Mom worked at home to help make ends meet. My mother didn't want me to go into the mills; she wanted me to get an education and get out of the dangerous mills. But my Dad insisted I go into the mill to work, 'Become a man,' he said.

"Last year, a crucible o' hot metal burnt through durin' the pouring of a mold. The hot metal splashed everywhere and men were terrible hurt. My dad was burnt real bad and died. After that, mom and me moved to Pittsburgh where she could find work. Then she got sick and died. They put me into a home with a bunch of other kids who had no parents. They wouldn't let me keep Sunny so I run off. You know the rest of the story. I had no money, so when I saw them loadin' that boat late at night near the Point I got an idea to head out with her. Me and Sunny went aboard and hid under a tarp in the back cargo hold. A couple o' days later the boat went to

ground and woke me up. When I looked around, I found no one was left on board. I found some food for me and Sunny, but I didn't know what else to do. So I waited. Then Billy and Delmar showed up."

Ell rubbed the boy's head, "Where were you goin'?"

"Don't rightly know for sure. I want to go back to school. I liked learnin' about things. But I don't reckon that'll happen now."

"Well son, if we get through this, I may be able to help you. My mother was a teacher and had friends at a school here in Wheelin'."

"I ain't got no money for schoolin'. In fact I ain't got no money for anything."

Jack moved closer to where he could see the boy's face a little better. "Ever hear tell of a thing called a scholarship?" The shy boy shook his head indicating he hadn't. "Well, there are schools that set aside money for deservin' kids to get an opportunity to attend school on other people's money. When she was alive, my mother worked to help young people get opportunities they normally wouldn't have. I know some of my parents' friends would help if I asked." Jack could see the boy's smile even in the dark. "We get through this without gettin' shot or arrested, we'll see what we c'n do for you."

The boy asked, "What about Sunny?"

"We'll figure that out when we get there. Don't think they have schools for big yeller dogs, though."

Jack kept an eye on the river for any sign of boats moving north or south on the dark river. He showed the boy and Ell how to look

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over the water at night to see another boat on the water. If a boat ran at night it was usually on a moonlit night. It was best if the water had just a little chop on the surface. The moonlight would highlight the small water displacements giving indication of river conditions that lay in front of a moving boat. A snag or shallow place in the river would be indicated by the moon's reflection on the water being slightly distorted. Any disturbance in the water's flow gives a good pilot signs of danger ahead, and he guides his boat into safer waters.

Some of the bravest pilots would run at night with fire baskets hung off the front of their boats, one on the starboard side and another off the port side. He'd run as close to shore as possible. A crewman would stand on the bow and give depth by sounding the water. A pilot proceeds slowly when traveling at night using this method. Problem was, if the river shallowed up quick or a snag was ahead, it was difficult to stop a two-hundred-ton boat even at very low speeds. The good pilots try to remember the river like a map in their heads; trouble was, the river was always changing the map.

Jack walked along the port side of the boat stopping to look at the distant light on the shore to make sure his position on the river hadn't changed. He stood at the midpoint in the boat and looked at a light a little brighter than the others on the corner of the island. It was four points off the port bow, the same as the last time he looked. He noticed below in the dark water the reflection of red sparks coming from the Mary E's stack. The occasional spark could give his boat's position away to the people carrying those six lights now

moving along the shore on the south end of the island. Police most likely looking for him. He could also see men with lanterns on the city wharf and moving along the shore. Too much activity at this time of night just to be catfishermen. Several people were looking for the Mary E.

The door to the engine room cracked open just a little, and Billy quietly called out, "Jack, you out there?" Billy couldn't see into the darkness after being inside near the light of the boiler fire.

Jack answered. "Yeah, I'm here." Jack had heard the sound of poppet valves relieving inside the engine's room a few minutes before and knew it was about time to go.

"Jack, we have eighty pounds. That should be enough to move us upriver slow. But the boiler will cool quick usin' what little steam we have."

Jack instructed Billy to send Brother-in-law forward to help Joshua pull up the drag anchor as the boat moved forward upstream. The trick to pulling a drag anchor free was to move forward slowly until the force of the boat pulled it from the mud. Brother-in-law would realize when it pulled loose and the two could easily pull it on board. At least, that's the way it usually goes.

Jack made his way into the wheelhouse and took a bearing on his boat's position in the river. The bow was still pointing slightly toward the island due to the drag anchor being tied to just the starboard side. He couldn't see the two on the front deck below, but he knew they were there. Jack rang up 'DEAD SLOW' to the engine

room. In just a few seconds, he felt the boat respond to the paddles starting to move him forward in the water. The boat's movement took the strain off the anchor rope as it moved upriver. Jack knew he should feel a slight pull of the anchor when the rope came taut under the boat. In just a second he should feel his boat move freely when the anchor released its hold on the bottom.

He stood holding the wheel to the rudders in a balanced position, neither to port nor starboard waiting for the slight tug of the anchor. As expected, the line came taut against the embedded anchor below. But instead of pulling free, the rope stretched for a moment until it reached the breaking point and recoiled, pulling the boat back. Jack signaled below 'STOP.' He turned his rudders to the starboard side and let the boat drift back. This time the river current pulled the boat back toward the Wheeling shoreline. The boat sat at more of an angle in the river. When he felt the rope come taut the next time, he signaled down 'SLOW AHEAD' again. He hoped the river's current against his boat's side and the force of the paddle would dislodge the anchor.

He didn't realize it, but he was holding his breath as the rope came taut once again against the submerged anchor. He felt the boat strain against the rope and realized he'd pulled free. Jack had done this maneuver several times before, but only in the daylight with a full head of steam for his engine.

He quickly turned the wheel upriver and moved toward the island side just up from the point where someone was walking around in

the dark. He wanted to stay to the far side of the river a good distance from the wharf and whoever may be waiting there. The boat moved easily in the calm waters to a position just near the bank as he came under the bridge that crossed above him. He pulled out his pocket watch and tried to see the time. He could almost make it out. He turned it toward the distant light of the city and squinted hard so he could see—a quarter t' four. *Good*, he thought to himself. *Another hour and the sun will begin to light the eastern sky and the boat'll begin to be seen in the middle of the channel.* As he moved past the north end of the island, he felt a little relieved at being away from the prying eyes in the city.

He could see on the far bank that a big steamer had put into shore for the night and was making ready to resume her journey downriver in the light. Pilots often beached their boats just outside of towns rather than at city wharfs. When a pilot tied off at a wharf, he had to pay a fee, and because of the convenience of disembarking at a wharf, the captain also usually had problems with passengers who went ashore and didn't return to the boat before the scheduled departure time. Tying off upriver made things easier—no wharf fee, no waiting for passengers to return—and when the big boat comes to life just before daylight and moves past the city, her passengers are comfortably sleeping in their cabins below.

The red fire from the steamer's six boilers being stoked below deck was shooting bright flames from her twin stacks. The early morning flames that danced from the stacks against the dark sky

looked like some great dragons coming to life from the river. The fire's reflection danced across the waters toward Jack's slow-moving boat. It gave the appearance of a display of fireworks at a summer carnival.

The whistle from the speaking tube sounded. "Jack, can I throw on more fuel and pump the bellows t' get up pressure? We're down to seventy-one pounds. We lose much more, we'll stall the drive piston."

Jack looked out toward the banks on each side of the boat before answering, "Yeah, go ahead, and signal up t' me when we're up t' steam." Jack would keep his boat in midstream and just barely moving in the current. He stepped out onto the side deck and looked down at Ell and Joshua sitting near the bow. "Hey, you two, come up here."

In a minute the two humans and one yeller dog came into the pilothouse. Joshua spoke first, "Did you see the fire from that steamer's stacks? It looked like the fires in the steel furnaces in Johnstown. But I've never seen such fires against the night sky."

Jack explained the grand steamer's morning plan to the pair. "I have a favor to ask of you two. First, Joshua, I need some help watchin' up and down the river for other boats that are beginnin' to move. We aren't up to steam yet and still have some difficulty maneuverin' in the current. Do you think you can help me watch the river?" Joshua eagerly nodded his head, anxious to help.

“Ell, I hate to ask but could you go down to the engine room and fetch me up some o’ that coffee Sarah gave us last evenin’? Most likely Billy set it next to the boiler to keep it warm. And somewhere there should be a bag of sandwiches she gave us. The Mary E don’t have what you’d call a kitchen, just a steel plate fixed on the side o’ the firebox above the steam manifold that we call a stove. The boat was built to prove her design could work, not as a functionin’ passenger boat.”

“Good to know. I was beginnin’ to wonder if this cruise was gonna serve breakfast and drinks.” Ell laughed as she started out the door, but stopped abruptly. “Jack, do you have any clothes a little more appropriate than this outfit?” Ell was still wearing a long dress with fancy frills around the edges.

Jack thought for a moment, “Next deck down, first cabin port side is mine, behind what was at one time a dinin’ area. You c’n see what I have; you’re welcome to whatever you find. Findin’ somethin’ clean, well, that may be another matter; this is a workboat that always has just men aboard; never figured to have a lady on board.” Jack looked a little sheepish, thinking about the mess Ell was sure to find in his cabin.

Ell grinned at Jack, “Well if I see a lady I’ll tell ’er what you said. How do you like your coffee?”

Jack replied, “Black. No cow’s milk on board.” Ell disappeared down the steps.

Chapter 11

Miller's Landing

The morning light had begun to fill the eastern sky. The river was clear and calm by the time Billy signaled to Jack that he had full steam pressure for the boiler. Jack signaled back to the engine room, 'AHEAD TWO THIRDS.' The bucket boards on the back of the boat hastened their endless rotation in and out of the water. Jack wondered whether or not the one damaged board was going to hold out and not break away under pressure. He couldn't feel the boat pulling toward the starboard side in the pilot wheel and hoped the board would hold out until they returned to Parlorton for repairs.

It seemed like a long time since he'd sat quietly on his wharf boat watching mayflies dance in the morning sun. He remembered listening to the soft sound of the water lapping on the side of the boat. He'd be glad when this salvage mission was over and he could return home. He hoped this trip turned a profit and no problems with the law or the OSL.

Joshua, sitting on the small bench near the back of the pilothouse, was deep asleep. The rhythmic sounds of the boat and the last couple of long nights had caught up to the young boy and his four-legged companion that also lay sleeping. Jack hoped his parents' friends would help him assure the boy's continued education and knew his parents would be proud of his commitment, even though a

continued formal education wasn't something Jack had wanted for himself.

Jack turned and looked to the far turn coming upriver. He could see, on the inside of the turn, the water's surface wasn't mirror smooth like it was out toward the middle. He knew this meant a gravel bar extended out into the river. He needed to guide the Mary E toward the heel of the turn as she entered the river's bend. Once into the turn, he'd bring her hard to port and straight back into the channel. Jack had learned long ago to read the surface of the river. He'd heard that the river one day would have dams like the one he was on his way to visit, from Pittsburgh clear down to the Mississippi River. Nearly a thousand miles of untamed river now lay shallow in the dry season and full of snags in the wet. The dams would give the river a safe depth of six feet or more, enough even for the big steamers.

The uncertainty of the river gave the rail industry a major advantage in dependable transportation of goods. The river had been reduced in recent years to moving low value cargo such as salt, coal and iron ore. If the dam raised the river, it would help bring back more work for the riverboats. It hopefully would make a pilot's life a whole lot easier in the dry season. Opening the river up for moving more commerce, on a river not as easily affected by changing river levels, would be a good thing. Jack realized that a new future for the river might be beyond his lifetime, but he took some joy in knowing

someday the river would be better for the river men who came after him, Billy, and Brother-in-law.

He heard the footsteps of someone coming up to the wheelhouse. Billy came in the door and looked back at the sleeping boy and dog. "Now, those two knows what they need, a good sleep. Jack, we need to lay over at Miller's Crossing and take on a load o' fuel. We'll need several cords o' firewood and twenty tons o' coal t' refill our supply. No big town there and no law. We could spend the night and get a good rest before goin' on t' find this guy you're lookin' for. Besides, we need t' let things get back to normal downriver. If we show up too soon, we may not get a chance to salvage the Boston before the law or Bourdon shows up to claim the salvage, or us. We should let the thing cool off, especially if that boat's where you think she is. We're the only ones who know she was sawyerin' just under the water's surface downriver toward the bend in the river. Even if they know where she went t' ground and exploded, that's at least two miles upriver from the turn. By the time Rockington went through the wreckage it'd be hard t' tell how far upriver it happened. Jack we're the only ones that have any idea where she might lay on the bottom."

Jack looked at the sleeping boy and realized Billy was correct. A salvage job would be hard work, if and when they got there and had the chance to go after the Boston. "O.K. We'll pick up supplies at Miller's Crossing. A few cases o' the good whiskey and a couple o' boxes o' cigars should fill our need for fuel for the entire trip, even all

the way back home. But we're not gonna spend the night there at Miller's. Just above Newell there's an island in midstream with a gravel approach from the downriver side. We can beach our bow and be safe out of the channel for the night. No towns or people for several miles in either direction."

Billy stood quiet for a minute while Jack moved the wheel to stay in the channel. Footsteps were again coming up the side steps. Ell had returned with the coffee and sandwiches. She'd changed clothes and was wearing a pair of Jack's old denim pants along with his light blue work shirt. Jack never made those clothes look like that. Ell had also washed her face and let down her hair. She pulled it back and tied it with an old shoestring. Jack gained a whole new appreciation for the lady, without make-up and fancy clothes, even though he'd seen her all fancied up. Her dark hair moved in the soft wind from the river, and her eyes sparkled without being hidden by makeup. Ell was a beautiful woman, and as she stood just inside the room, Jack began to realize that fact.

"Coffee, boys?" The smell of coffee woke Joshua from his sleep.

To pass some time, Jack showed Ell and Joshua the finer points of guiding a riverboat through twists and turns of the river. About noon, he saw Miller's Crossing coming up on the Ohio side of the river.

Miller's Crossing is a shallow place in the river, and in the dry season a wagon could make it across if it stayed in the right path. But when water was flowing higher, Miller ferried moving wagons and

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freight over across the river to area's mills and mines. Above the landing, there was a small general store with a yard full of fuel where the steamers could stock up for their boilers. But the newer, bigger, steamers couldn't get close to the shore these days because, over time, the bottom of the river had been filling in with sediment and gravel. The good thing about Miller's Crossing is the owner would deal in money, gold, silver, or whiskey, and Jack had plenty of whiskey to make a deal.

"Joshua, go down and tell Brother-in-law to move four cases o' whiskey and a couple cases o' cigars toward the front o' the cargo deck. If old man Miller suspects we have a lot more hidden under those tarps he'll be harder to talk out of the fuel we need." The boy took off down the steps with the dog close behind.

Jack moved the telegraph to signal 'SLOW AHEAD' to the engine room and blew into the talking tube. "Billy, we're puttin' into the dock soon. I want you to keep the boiler warm and ready to leave if we need to. Anything you want from the store?"

The voice in the tube said, "Yeah, how about some of them peppermint sticks? Remember the last time we was here I picked up some? I've had a hankerin' for 'em ever since I knew we was stoppin' here."

Jack called down below, "Can do."

As they approached the dock, Jack's attitude became all business. He looked at how the wind moved across the river to form ripples in the water where he knew the water ran shallow even in the good

times. His approach to the large wooden post that the wharf sat on had to be perfect. Laying the Mary E in gentle on the pilings was important. If he wasn't careful, the shallow water currents could push her stern in toward the bank. Most big steamers held steady mid-river and their supplies were ferried out to them. With Jack's skills as a pilot, his smaller boat could safely make its way into the dock, but the real trick was getting her back out into the river.

"Joshua, when we touch the pilin', jump careful onto the dock an' wrap the bow line around the post. Careful now. You have to jump a split second before the boat hits the dock." Jack rang 'DEAD SLOW' to the engine room and it answered 'DEAD SLOW.' He gauged the distance and speed as both diminished between boat and dock. At the right moment he signaled down to the engine's room, 'STOP.' The momentum of the boat carried it slowly toward the dock. Jack could see Joshua standing near the edge with line in hand, waiting to jump at the last second, and just like he was told to do, he sprang across to the dock at the last second and began to wrap the bow line to the heavy support post. Jack looked toward the stern expecting to see Brother-in-law doing the same job with the stern line. But, to his surprise, Ell had pulled the heavy line over and was wrapping it around the wooden post. The boat pulled tight the securing lines and the forward motion was stopped. The Mary E was secure at Miller's Crossing.

Jack looked toward the back of the boat and could see Billy releasing steam pressure from the boiler. Billy would keep the fires

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under the boiler hot, but to avoid a pressure explosion, and until Jack was ready to move the boat, he'd have to vent the steam that would usually be used to drive the engine. It would be a waste of fuel, but Jack wanted to take no chances if he needed to leave the crossing in a hurry.

Jack hurried down the steps onto the main deck where Billy was standing. "Billy, keep pressure on the gauge and vent the rest. Anythin' happens, we wanna be ready and able to maneuver out into the channel." Both men walked to the starboard side and looked out into the main channel.

Jack looked in front of the boat and could tell from the slight ripples on the surface that the water wasn't very deep in front of the boat. He looked downriver behind the stern and saw that a sandbar came out in the river about a hundred yards downstream. "Looks like we'll have to let 'er drift back and then turn 'er into the channel and make some speed to clear the shallows off the port side." Jack patted Billy on the shoulder, "We've done it before, and we'll do it this time. Don't worry."

Billy looked at the water and said, "I'm down below and can't see what's happening anyhow. Just don't you forget my peppermint sticks. Now, that would upset me." The men laughed as Billy returned to the engine room and Jack headed toward the general store on the hill.

The walkway up the hill was wet and muddy from wagons moving up from the ferry crossing. Deep ruts and plenty of horse

droppings made the way even more difficult to cover. The dock area was designed so wagons could come down the hill onto the wharf and unload next to the boats that came into the shallow port. Then, on the downriver end of the wharf, the road circled back to the top of the hill. Supply wagons could make a circle again and again bringing down supplies.

Jack and Ell finally made the climb to the front of the store. They stopped for a minute and looked back toward the river and the Mary E waiting below before going into the store. Miller's general store had sat on the banks of the Ohio River for many years and was built high to stay above the spring floods. The steep banks didn't make it an ideal place for a re-supply location, but the crossing for wagons went back beyond anyone's recollection of who first made it. The bottom was shale rock, so it wasn't likely a wagon would founder in the river if it stayed on the correct track when crossing. A large wooden post, painted white, stood on each side of the river. Teamsters knew, when driving their loads across in the dry season, to aim for the post. If they stayed on a straight line between the two points they weren't likely to have problems. It was only three feet at its deepest point in the dry season. Both the ferry and the wagons could cross, moving supplies and cargo from one side of the river to the other. The steep bank on the Ohio side was the worst part for wagons heavy with cargo, but moving equipment from one side of the river to the other was important to the local mills just upriver.

There was talk of the railroad building a bridge near the crossing because of the hard bottom. Surveyors came through last fall laying out the track it would take from one side to the other. Old man Miller realized if that happened the river crossing would no longer be the best way across for the steel mills. The bottom of the river next to his dock had filled in with sand and gravel over the years making it too shallow except for small packets and towboats. The railroad coming would put Miller's services out of business. Selling fuel to the smaller boats couldn't sustain his business. New loading terminals upriver could load a boat in half the time with steam cranes mounted on large concrete abutments. They could lower fuel and supplies down to boats waiting deep in harbors dredged out by workboats. Times were changing and Miller knew it.

The general store wasn't fancy by any means. The floor was constructed from rough-cut boards that over time had been worn smooth by an untold number of muddy shoes and boots belonging to river men and teamsters. Inside the front door, the wooden floor was worn down even more from being in the direct path of everyone who passed in and out of the store. The ceiling was open, and a variety of merchandise hung from the store's high rafters. Cooking pots, long strings of dried beans, bundles of tobacco, and hand tools all hung motionless above the open room. In the center of the room was a large black stove used to keep the store warm in winter. A blackened coffee pot sat cold on the stovetop, and it most likely had been awhile since the stove was last fired up to brew a pot of coffee.

Still, the smell of wood smoke seemed present in the air. On the shelves were all manner of items a man could want. Tins of beans and corn. Feed sacks with grain, flour, and coffee. Coils of rope and strap leather. Along one wall were wooden barrels with an assortment of tools' handles sticking out. Behind the counter was a shelf that reached clear up to the rafters. All manner of merchandise sat on the high shelves. A layer of dust gave many items the appearance of having been there a long time. The beam of sunlight that came through a small hole in the roof shone bright and was filled with small particles of floating dust.

In the back of the store was a raised area that old man Miller called his office and place of doing business. If a deal was to be made for supplies and fuel, that was where it was to be made. The windows let in light from outside, but the room was still dim to any eyes that came in from the outside. Jack said softly to Ell, "Let me do the talkin'; this guy's a horse trader from way back. He can read a person quicker'n any riverboat gambler could. Best you pick up the supplies we need while I go bargain for fuel." Ell understood and moved toward the dry goods and tins of food.

Jack's eyes had adjusted to the dim light, and he could see Miller sitting at his desk looking down from his second-floor office. He could tell Miller was interested in looking at Ell as she checked on items in the front of the store. Jack put on his best trading face and made his way to the set of stairs that led up to the second floor of the old store. Wooden boxes full of candles and hardware sat on the

steps and blocked much of the way. Jack approached the stairs and gave a holler to the man who sat watching Ell move around the store.

"Mr. Miller? Jack Dulin. Can I come up?"

From above, Jack heard the man clear his throat. "Supposin', if you c'n make your way around all the stuff on them steps. I gotta get t' puttin' that stuff away soon 'fore someone trips on it. The way most sons-'o-bitches are nowadays, they'd want to get some fancy lawyer out of Pittsburgh and sue me. Couldn't get much, though, damn business is about gone now. And iffing they build that damnable railroad bridge, those sons-a-bitches'll get the rest. What you waitin' for? Get your ass up here. I'm a busy man. 'Sides, I want you to tell me who that fine lookin' lady is down there lookin' around on the floor."

Jack worked his way to the top of the steps around the wooden boxes and figured, by the looks of them, the boxes had been there for years and weren't likely going to be put away soon.

"What the hell do you want? What did you say your name was?" Miller bellowed.

Jack thought for a moment. Miller didn't remember him from previous stops and most likely didn't give two cents about who he was anyhow. Jack figured it may be best if he told a bit of a story in case word of him pirating had beat him upriver. "Jack's my name, out of Muskingum City, headed toward Pittsburgh with a load of hog lard outta the renderin' plant in Muskingum City. Hard for a man to make a livin' on the river these days. Them damn railroads are killing

the river man's way o' life." Hauling hog rendering was a low job in the eyes of most people along the river. Didn't pay much, and when the day warms up the containers sometimes leaked the greasy lard.

"You got that right. The railroad with them noisy machines that pulls all them cars over the rails aren't near as pretty as a big steamer movin' over the water. What the hell do you want, Jack?"

"Well, I'm a needin' a load o' fuel wood and twenty tons o' coal, and a few supplies the lady down there picks out."

Miller put on his business face now, time for talking anything else was over. "Well, I know what you want, and if you had cash you'd be out in the yard talkin' with the foreman tellin' him t' load your boat. By the way, what's the name o' your vessel?"

"I call her the Mary E, named after my mother. I salvaged her some years ago. Me and my crew do odd haulin' jobs on the river t' make our way. Heard a man could pick up a load and haul it all the way to the falls o' the Ohio and make a dollar or two." Miller moved some papers around his desk as if he were looking for something. He mumbled to himself, "Mary E, I heard that name before, I think." He looked up at Jack quick, like he wanted to catch him off guard. "Ever been here before?"

"Yes sir, most likely been a couple o' years back, but we've done business before."

Miller went back to moving papers around his desk. Finally he found what he was looking for, a pair of spectacles. He was still grumbling as he put them on and looked closer at Jack's face.

"I can see far, but up close I can't see a damn thing clear. Wanna see your face; I once could remember a man's face for years. Hell, I don't recognize my own sometimes in the mirror anymore." He began to laugh and, after a moment, Jack joined in just to be polite. After a few seconds, Miller's laugh caused him to start to cough, a real deep cough of a man who smoked and chewed tobacco his whole life. Jack noticed Miller's spittoon that was nearly filled to overflowing with liquid and old cigar butts. After a while, Miller coughed up some disgusting material from his chest and spat into that nearly overflowing container.

"What you got to trade, Mr. Jack of the Mary E?"

"Now don't you go askin' where I got this stuff. Man's gotta right to try an' make a livin' sometimes any way he can."

Miller looked at Jack with a raised eyebrow. "Stolen, is it? Well as long as the law ain't on your tail, I best not know about it. Now what do you have?"

Jack looked around as if he didn't want anyone to hear. Ell and the counter clerk were so far away they couldn't have heard anyway. Jack was playing the part well. He just had to be careful not to overplay his hand. Miller was no fool. "I got four cases o' store whiskey and four cases o' Wheelin' cigars, to trade for fuel and a few provisions."

"What kind o' whiskey? Ain't that stuff you just fill empty bottles with that's been made in the back room, is it?"

Jack reached into the inside of his jacket and pulled out a pint bottle and a handful of cigars. "Best you try 'em for yourself before we make a deal. Don't want it to be said Jack traded bad whiskey to Miller. Feller gets a reputation like that and everybody on the river would soon know. No sir, I want you to try what I'm tradin' before we shake on a deal."

Miller had a weakness for good whiskey and cigars. These days, neither came his way very often. Jack knew this was top trading material. Miller opened the drawer to his desk and pulled out a small glass. He looked up at Jack, "You'll forgive me iff'n I don't offer you a drink." He twisted the top off the bottle and smelled the bottle's contents. Closed his eyes for a second while he took in the aroma. He opened them and cleared his throat again and spat into the disgusting spittoon once again. Then he poured a drink, but before he sampled the glass he wiped his mouth with his shirtsleeve, and smeared the tobacco juice that was running down the corners of his mouth all over the fabric. "Yes sir, that's real store-bought whiskey." Miller looked hard at Jack, "Didn't kill anybody to get this, did ya'? I ain't holdin' with killin' for somethin'."

Jack just shook his head no to Miller's question. Next, Miller took one of the hand-rolled cigars and held it close to his failing eyes, turning it as he examined it. "Gotta be careful this ain't one o' them downriver imitations. Only good cigar on the river comes from Wheeling, and this is one—smells like one of 'em." Miller bit off the end and spat it into the spittoon. He then pulled a strike match out

of the desk drawer and moved it across the wood surface of the desk to ignite it. By the looks of the desk, he'd done that thousands of times before. He sat back in his chair, pulled the smoke deep into his lungs, and held it for what seemed a long time before blowing the smoke in Jack's direction. He began once again with deep terrible coughing, turned, and again spat into the spittoon. "Now, that's a good smoke," he finally bellowed out loud so all in the store could hear.

He began to rummage around his desk until he found a piece of paper and scribbled words and figures on it. He began to hand it to Jack and, at the last second, pulled it back. "I got your word you got four full cases o' each o' these items o' the same quality?"

Jack stood up straight, "No man worth his salt on the river would try and cheat Miller out of his due. No sir, it's just as I say. Send your man down to the boat and he can retrieve the goods in question. That way you can check before we're finished loadin'."

Miller handed Jack the paper and called down to the clerk who was at the counter helping Ell. "Hey, You! Go get my yard foreman and bring him here." The clerk disappeared out the front door and in just a minute returned with a big man who wasn't wearing a shirt. The shirtless man looked up toward Miller and Miller called down orders. "Send a man down to this feller's boat and retrieve my property. Then load the wagons and give him five cords of wood and, how much coal did you say?"

Jack answered, "Twenty tons."

The man left the store with no more said. Jack stuck his hand out to Miller, and the deal was closed. Miller gave him a slip of paper and told him to give it to the clerk for the supplies he and the lady needed. He poured another glass of whiskey and sat back in his chair to enjoy his good fortune.

Jack made his way back down to the front of the store where Ell was purchasing food to be taken aboard. "It's been a long time since I shopped like this. It feels good to think about preparin' meals for someone again."

Jack smiled as he looked at Ell. Then he remembered, "Billy's peppermint sticks." He went to the end of the counter and examined several jars of stick candy before finding the one he was looking for. Jack made a selection of candy and placed it in a couple bags. Brother-in-law and Joshua might have a sweet tooth as well. As he was putting the candy in the small bags, he noticed a few items of women's clothing in the counter below. The clerk asked if there would be anything else today, and Jack pointed toward a yellow shirt with a white collar and then to a box of hair ribbons. "Ell, which one goes with this color? I'm not a knowin' which goes together, and I know ladies want such things to match."

Ell sorted through the box and found a pale blue ribbon which she held up next to her hair. "What do you think, Jack? Is it the right color?"

Jack noticed that her dark blue eyes sparkled as she faced the outside light. He responded, "It's perfect."

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The clerk added up the items and told Jack the total for the supplies and fuel, and Jack handed him the slip of paper that Miller had given him for the deal. The clerk looked at it and said, "I guess we're even, then. They're loadin' your boat. Oughtta be done in an hour or so."

About then, one of the work wagons pulled up out front and two men came in carrying the boxes of whiskey and cigars. Miller called down from the back, "Bring that stuff up here. If I leave it down there, you bastards'll steal me blind." Jack threw his hand up to Miller as he left the store.

Jack had his arms full, and Ell was also carrying several burlap bags of supplies as they left the store. Getting up the muddy hill was difficult enough, but getting back down with supplies was far worse. Jack signaled down to Brother-in-law and Joshua to come and give them a hand.

The two took the bags from Ell and one from Jack. That gave Jack an open arm to help Ell down the steep hill to the wharf. "Y'all must've bought everything old man Miller had in the store," Brother-in-law spouted out as they reached the edge of the Mary E.

"Thought you might be interested in eatin' for the next few days," Ell responded with a smile.

The wagons coming and going kept it busy on the wooden platform for the next hour. The two men who drove the teams and then helped unload the wagons certainly earned whatever Miller paid them. Most likely the mills in the area paid a fee each month to

Miller for ferry and cargo services. That was probably how he made most of his money. The railroad and the future bridge would take that dependable money source away. Over time, the general store and fuel yard would be grown over with weeds and forgotten to the world. The cold iron rails would kill one more important part of the river.

The crew of the *Mary E* helped to stack the wood and move the coal into the bins. It took several more hours to arrange the load on the boat and maintain the proper balance in the water. Too much forward would cause the bow to plow through the water. Too far back and the paddle would dip deep and perhaps catch a snag below the surface. It also made steering the boat more difficult. Jack made sure his boat was balanced correctly for her journey.

“Are we ready?” Jack asked his crew.

Billy finished a drink of water from the rain barrel and blurted out, “Where’re my peppermint sticks?”

Jack grinned and shook his head. “Don’t worry, Ell got ’em for ya. Let’s get the steam up and see if we c’n get outta here with no problems. Billy, how’s the pressure?”

“I’ll close off the vent valves an’ open the dampers, and we should have near a hundred and forty pounds,” Billy told Jack.

“Pump the bellows and put on some dry wood to get pressure up. I want a hundred and fifty pounds when I try and maneuver outta here. We have t’ drift back downriver and then full steam in a hard starboard turn t’ get back toward the channel and stay off the

sandbar.” Jack didn’t want to take any chances with the tricky maneuver close to shore.

Billy asked Jack, “You want me to disengage the starboard drive paddle to make a quicker turn?”

Jack replied, “No, I want all the power I c’n get, and takin’ one set o’ paddles out cuts down forward force, so I’ll try and do it with just the rudders and a little luck.”

Thick, billowing gray smoke filled with sparks poured from the stack and could easily be seen in the daylight. Billy was moving lots of air over the firebox to get the boiler up to pressure. After about half an hour the whistle blew in the pilothouse. Jack pulled the plug to listen. “We got a hundred and fifty pounds. She’s all yours.”

Jack spoke back down to Billy, “Listen sharp to the signal bells. We have to get this right the first time.” Billy understood.

Jack looked out the port side onto the wharf. “Let loose the shore lines and come aboard quick,” he called down to Brother-in-law and Joshua. The two unwrapped the lines, jumped aboard, and pulled the heavy lines onto the deck. They started coiling the lines before the boat even began to float downstream. Jack hung out the port window of the pilothouse to watch how close the shore and the stern of his boat were to each other. He figured the small current that ran along the shore should be enough to push the boat off to clear the riverbank.

The Mary E had drifted about fifty feet back when Jack rang below ‘TWO-THIRDS AHEAD.’ Before he had even removed his

hand from the bell cord, he could feel the paddles digging into the water. He brought the wheel hard over to the right to head the bow toward deeper water. He looked back and saw mud being stirred up by the paddles. He knew there wasn't much water under her keel, and the shallow water robbed the paddle of power, but the boat was committed. All Jack could do was hold his breath and say a little prayer.

The boat was moving toward the main river. Jack could see ripples on the surface just off the port bow, and he knew the depth of the water wasn't good. A few seconds later, he felt the port side rock up as she dug into the gravel and rock bottom. He signaled 'ALL STOP.' The Mary E sat motionless in the water for what seemed an eternity, then he sensed she was floating downriver off the gravel bottom. Jack looked up toward the sky and said under his breath, "I owe You another one."

The boat drifted nearly a hundred yards before Jack knew he had plenty of room to turn her hard to port and into the channel to continue their trip upriver. Jack turned and looked back toward the landing and watched it grow smaller for a couple minutes before looking at the river ahead. It should be smooth passage to the island where he wanted to spend the night. The Mary E would journey to the dam tomorrow.

Chapter 12

The Island

The trip upriver from Miller's Crossing was smooth and uneventful. The channel was a good five feet deep most places. Just a few sandbars and shoals along the way. Most of the river valley had little population along the upper part where Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia came together. The rugged area along the valley had yet to become abundant with homes and towns, but the railroad was coming and soon people could travel from Pittsburgh alongside the river. Towns and businesses would follow, and the green wilderness would begin to disappear. Some called it progress as the nineteenth century would, in a few years, give way to the twentieth. It was said that a person could travel the entire length of the country in less than three weeks by train. In some ways it seemed that men were always in a hurry these days,

Jack knew the small island, just past a long sweeping turn in the river, would be a good place to spend the night and get a good rest. He'd pushed himself and his friends hard, and it was time to let Billy out of the boiler room. But with the smell of food coming up through the speaking tube from the boiler room, Jack wasn't sure Billy'd want to come out.

He guessed Ell was using the makeshift stove on the side of the boiler to fix a real supper for the crew. He wasn't sure what all she

picked out back at Miller's, but it sure smelled good inside the pilothouse. He remembered the meals his mom used to make when he was growing up and how the kitchen always smelled like cinnamon.

But first, they needed to make a soft landing on the island just ahead in the river. Jack signaled down to Billy, 'SLOW ON ENGINES.' He felt the boat shudder as Billy cut back the steam to the engines. He could see steam coming out of her vent pipes. The forward movement was just enough to move over the water. At this time of day, the water often became glass-smooth, and the Mary E almost seemed to glide toward the southern point of the island. Jack gauged his speed and distance to the gravel bar he knew extended out from the end of the island. When he believed the boat's forward motion could carry them to rest, he signaled Billy to stop the engine. In less than a minute, Jack could hear the keel digging into the gravel bottom below the water. She might have run on the bottom a little harder than he hoped, but they'd deal with that tomorrow. The Mary E was home for the night. He wasn't sure if the island had a name, only that it was uninhabited.

Jack called down the speaking tube to the engine room, "Billy, bank the fire in the boiler so we won't have to start totally cold in the mornin'. Make sure the doctor pump has filled the water tank for the boiler, and don't forget to crack open the safety vents. That should take care of 'er for the night."

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Billy had done this at least a couple hundred times and he knew it was important for the steam-operated doctor pump to keep a safe water level in the boiler. He also knew that the steam vents should be opened to prevent pressure building overnight. Jack always gave him instructions how to put the boiler to bed for the night, though, and Billy always pretended like it was the first time he'd heard how to do it.

Jack walked out onto the front deck and looked at where his boat came to rest. He looked at the back chute of the island and then at the main channel to determine if his boat would hold fast without tying off for the night. The river ran straight at this point with no side or cross currents pushing on the boat. She should hold fast for the night, but he'd put out the drag anchor off her bow—just in case—so she wouldn't float free.

Jack was securing the anchor line when Joshua came up from behind him. "Captain, can me and Delmar take Sunny on the island and see if we can find a couple rabbits?"

Jack saw Brother-in-law standing back waiting for an answer. "The shotgun should be in the closet in the cabin. Don't shoot yourself in the foot or nothin'." He laughed as the boy and Brother-in-law went in search of the gun.

Jack went to the engine room where Billy was banking the boiler and Ell was working at the makeshift stove cooking some beans and bacon. "Ell, Brother-in-law and the boy are gonna go after a couple

o' rabbits. They won't be gone long, these island are full of 'em, no dogs or foxes to kill 'em off."

Ell looked at Billy, "Well, them biscuits you asked me to bake? Looks like I'll have a little time to fix 'em now."

Jack walked back out onto the front deck and could see the hunting party heading toward the island. The big yeller dog ran barking toward the tall weeds. Jack realized the dog jumped a rabbit and, like he suspected, it wasn't long until he heard the first gunshot somewhere in the tall weeds.

Jack sat down on the small wooden barrel and relaxed for a few minutes. He was surprised how much he was enjoying himself on this trip. He'd learned something about a question he'd carried since the war about the debt he never knew he owed. He now had an opportunity to help a young boy get the education he, himself, never wanted, and he knew if it were possible for his parents to know he helped the boy, it would make them proud. He'd made a deal with an old man whose life was changing, much as the river and the land along the flowing waters would also soon do. And he got to spend time with his friends, Billy and Brother-in-law, in an unexpected adventure he hoped would turn out for the best. This was one of the best trips he'd ever had on the river, but he also remembered danger lay ahead for him and his friends. Then he remembered Ell and her smile; this was totally unexpected for him. He wasn't sure if what he was feeling was something he'd never known before or just a passing fancy. He sat back and enjoyed the quiet moment in the evening sun.

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Voices from over in the distant weeds caught his attention, and he saw the big yeller dog and the two hunters emerge from the tall grass. He could see that rabbit was on the menu for tonight's supper.

The river was growing quiet with the setting sun. The only movements on the river were caused by the large dragonflies that swooped down and touched the water's surface. Each time they flew away, the place they'd touched was marked by a tiny ring that spread across the glass-smooth surface. In the distance, the sounds of the tiny green frogs that lived high in the trees along the river filled the air as they sang their shrill songs of love. The low drum of the big dark bullfrogs echoed from their hiding places along the riverbanks in the growing darkness. Jack loved this time of day. At times like this, he remembered his home far from here and how much he missed it.

Jack helped the returning hunting party back aboard the boat. They jumped down when leaving for their hunting trip, but getting back aboard was a little more tricky, especially for the yeller dog, but Brother-in-law picked him up and pushed him toward the deck, and Jack finished getting him on board. It wasn't long until the other two were back on deck, too. Joshua held up three rabbits, hide gone and washed out in the river. Fresh woods rabbit was something Jack hadn't had for a while, but it wasn't long until the aroma of cooking rabbit filled the air around the boat.

Jack and Billy fashioned a table out of boards and a couple water barrels on the front deck. Seats were a mixture of small wooden

cages and wooden boxes. Nothing fancy, but practical. They hung the lantern high above the deck so the night insects wouldn't bother them as they ate their stove-cooked meal.

It was obvious that Ell had spent time in a kitchen somewhere in her life. The makeshift table was set with fried rabbit, beans with bacon, and homemade biscuits. As far as the crew of the *Mary E* was concerned, no better banquet was set on any other table that night.

"Ell, if you don't mind me askin', how'd you come to have such fine skills when it comes to preparin' a dinner table and food?" Brother-in-law asked. The one sure way to get his attention was with food. He'd made a career of eating food and was, by all accounts, an expert. His waistline was testament to that. Sarah's cooking was most likely what attracted him to her in the first place.

Ell hesitated for a moment before answering. "When I was growin' up, my family ran a restaurant near the lake in Chicago. I have five sisters and two brothers in my family. I sometimes believed my parents had children just so they'd have someone to work at the restaurant. We were expected from an early age to do what we could at the business. Seven days a week, from mornin' to late evenin', we worked in the family restaurant. My brothers ran off, William when he was fourteen and Bryan a couple years later. Not sure whatever happened to them. Their leavin' made it that much harder for us girls who were left behind to work at the restaurant. One night, I got into an argument with my father. He hit me and told me to get out, so I did. I took what little money I'd saved and hoped to make it to

Georgia to stay with my mother's sister who lived there until I could find a job. But the money ran out in Pittsburgh, and I didn't know what to do. Tilley ran the boardin' house and her gentlemen's business. She offered me a room until I got on my feet. No strings attached, just an opportunity to get back on my feet. She was kind, and the girls who worked for her became my friends. And, with the young boy here, I'll leave the rest of the story untold."

The five friends sat in the light of the lantern and enjoyed the home-cooked food, but they also enjoyed each other's company. Ell looked at Billy, "I believe I've heard a little about everyone here but you."

Billy was a big man, with sandy-colored hair that was in need of a good cutting. His broad face supported a full beard that covered a good part of his chin and he had a heavy mustache that hid his entire upper lip. His muscle-man frame spoke of the hard physical work he'd done for most of his life. Most times he wore a smile on his face, but it was hard to find in that nest of hair. His hands were twice the size of a normal man's.

Billy'd worked the boats up and down the river most of his life. He'd spent a short time working ocean boats and on the Mississippi River, but he always came home to the Ohio. He often told people he felt most at home on the slow-moving river.

"Billy, are you gonna tell me about yourself?" Ell asked.

"Not much to tell. Not sure where I was born or even the year. From what my ma told me, it was in the winter of '48. My dad

worked a coal tow out of Kentucky, and Ma was the cook on the boat. Somewhere between Cincinnati and the falls of the river at Louisville, I was born. Didn't make much difference when or where, I was just born. I grew up on the boat for the first years that I can remember. That was till she hit a snag and damaged her paddle assembly. The boat's owners said it would cost too much to repair so he scrapped her out. Pa said there was talk o' war comin' and metal was sellin' so high for scrap, and that's what influenced the owners' decision to scrap the old towboat. After that, we settled near Louisville and Pa got a job workin' downriver on the Mississippi. He weren't home much after that. Ma took in sewin' and mendin' clothes. Made a good livin' at it, too.

"Not sure how old I was when I got the urge to go workin' on the river to help out with money. I lied about my age and, bein' that I was large for it, never got any question of my real age. So it never mattered, and matters even less these days. I never saw any of the war; my workin' on the river kep' me away from most o' the fightin'. Did see the fires near Vicksburg when the steamer I was a workin' come upriver the summer of '63. But it was so far away it could've been some farmer clearin' forest that I was a seein' burnin'. A couple o' the crewmen told me it was a battle between federals and confederates, but who knows?

"Met Jack on a snag-puller in the mid-seventies. We struck up a friendship and over the years we worked several jobs together. Moved t' Parlorton on account o' Jack livin' and workin' there. Well,

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you know about the Mary E, and ever since, I've been workin' salvage runs with Jack. A sister I hadn't met came north lookin' for me some years back, brung that one-eared Brother-in-law with her. They settled in Wheeling, where he worked the wharf and sometimes the boats that were lookin' for help.

"There, Miss Ell, now you knows all there is to know about me an' my family. River and the people on it have been family to me my whole life and someday when I pass on, I've told Jack and Sis to wrap me in a woolen blanket and tie stones to me and drop me in the deepest hole in the river. Most likely I'll meet eternity in the arms of the Ohio River."

Jack looked at Billy, "Damn, I didn't know all that about you, and I've known you for nigh on twenty years."

The men opened a bottle of the store whiskey and finished off the meal. Ell and the boy began to do what little cleanup was needed. Ell was getting ready to toss the leftovers to the fish when Jack stopped the conversations. It must have been near nine-thirty when Jack heard something coming downstream. "Brother-in-law, go turn the lantern out. I heard somethin'." Quickly, he scrambled to the upper deck and pulled in the lantern and extinguished the flame.

Jack stood looking upstream, but the dark made it difficult to see very far past the trees that hung out over the river. The frogs, hearing a strange sound, went quiet in the dark as Jack strained to see. It was a small workboat, no longer than thirty feet. The vertical

boiler sat out in the open and the small steam engine was directly behind it. Jack had seen the type before. The firebox was located in the back and the water for the boiler had to be refilled with a bucket from the river into a small tank above the boiler. The door to the boiler was open and the fire created enough light that Jack could easily see the boat and its operator. He'd seen these small workboats before on the river, but most had exploded or just been abandoned along the shore. Lots of work to keep them going and dangerous to operate. Whatever this boat was, and whoever was piloting it, it was coming straight for the Mary E in the dark.

The engine made a sound like "chug-chug-chug-chug" as it came down toward the grounded steamer. Then a voice called out, "AHOY, Catfish Rob here! I've been a smellin' your food for five miles upriver. Got any left?"

Jack could see the man operating the small workboat moving around behind the boiler. By the sound of the steam, he knew the operator had taken the steam away from the drive engine and the paddles were no longer turning. Unlike a bigger boat, it appeared the small craft had no reversing engine. The small boat was coasting toward the side of the Mary E at a pretty good speed.

As the boat approached, Jack could more clearly see the man in the boat. "Hey, take hold of the line, mister, and secure it to the keel to slow my boat down."

Jack could see the boat was still coming at a fair pace and would coast right on by if he didn't take hold of the line. The boat's

operator had lined his boat up so it would move right alongside Jack's boat, but without a reversing engine it would glance off and keep on going.

The man stood near the bow of his boat and tossed the line to Jack, "Tie it off now and be quick about it."

Jack did as the man asked and quickly wrapped the rope in a figure-eight pattern around the starboard keel. When the line came taut, it held the front of the boat, but the stern began to swing out and turn her small paddle wheel toward the south. The small boat continued swinging around until she came in hard against the side of the *Mary E.* The boat hit so hard, its impact could be felt on the deck boards of the bigger boat.

"No reversin' engine. That's what killed off this type o' boat, and the fact they blow themselves to kingdom come sure didn't help any, neither." The man's laugh was so loud it echoed off the far bank and returned, giving his laughter an even stranger sound. For an old feller he sure was loud.

Jack looked down into the smaller boat and the man standing next to the odd-looking boiler. Jack wasn't sure who or what this guy was, only that he'd nearly run into his boat. He wore buckskin clothes like some frontiersman out of a Wild Bill's sideshow. On his feet were Indian moccasins that appeared to be as old as the man who was wearing them. His hair was long and gray and tied back into a ponytail. Most likely hadn't been washed since the last time he fell into the river. And his chin whiskers hung nearly to his belt line.

The odd man held out his hand, expecting a pull up onto the main deck. "Name's Catfish Rob. Meanest, orneriest man on this blessed river. I wrestled a bear near Keys Rocks upriver. Jumped into a den of rattlesnakes and bit their heads off, and rode a two-hundred pound snappin' turtle from the Allegheny down to the Ohio. Yes sir, I am the greatest fisherman and outdoorsman on this part of the river. Got any of that grub left? Sure smells good, cookin'!"

The crew of the *Mary E* didn't quite know what to say or do. Had they taken aboard an escaped man from some wild west sideshow at the carnival?

Catfish sees Ell standing near the makeshift table. "Now that's what a cook should look like, little lady. You got some o' that grub for old Catfish?" Ell was still trying to figure out who this guy was when he spied the whiskey bottle. "Is that real store-bought and paid-for whiskey?" He took the backside of his arm and wiped his lips as he stared at the bottle. "Man can become pretty parched workin' the river all day; a swig o' the bottle would clear a lot o' dust from his throat."

Jack didn't figure dust from up or down the river was this guy's problem. "Ell, we have some rabbit left from supper. Give our guest what's left while I pour 'im a drink."

Ell, not wanting to get too close, slid the plate across the table. Jack wasn't sure what smelled worse, the filthy buckskin clothes or the man who most likely couldn't remember the last time he took a

bath with soap. Billy figured it was the boat that smelled bad. He could see a couple catfish in the bottom, a muskrat, and a bucket of some sort of cut-up bait, long past being ripe.

“Little stingy with the whiskey, aren’t ya’ son? I be needin’ another fillin’ o’ my glass, or best you just leave the bottle,” Catfish said as he once again wiped his mouth.

Jack smiled and poured Catfish Rob’s glass full as he quickly devoured the last of the rabbit and bean supper. “What brings you downriver, Catfish?” Jack asked the man as he finished the rabbit and wiped his hands on his clothes.

“Huntin’ turtles. Them fancy rest’rants in Pittsburgh pays good money for fresh turtles. They say them people who stay there’ll pay a dollar a bowl for genuine turtle soup. This time o’ year, the cats are under the rocks in the river and hard to catch unless you’re willin’ to go stick your arm or leg into the holes to pull ’em out.”

Ell ventured closer to the table, “Mr. Catfish, why’re you dressed like that? Aren’t you hot and uncomfortable?”

“Damn right I am, little lady, but them people who buy my stuff tells customers the fish and turtles are caught by a real frontiersman who opened the river years ago. Makes the price higher.” He gave her a little wink. “Come over here, sweetie, I wanna show ya’ somethin’.” He jumped down into his boat and opened a wooden chest on the far side. He grabbed the lantern and held it over the box so Ell and the others could see what was inside. There must have been twenty to thirty snapping turtles in the wooden container.

The turtles were struggling to try and crawl out of the place that imprisoned them.

“I get two dollars apiece for ’em, and the fancy rest’rants can say they’re wild turtles caught by the famous Catfish Rob. That’s me, wildest, meanest fisherman and turtle-hunter on the river from here to the falls of the Ohio.”

Suddenly, he sat down, pulled off his left moccasin, and stuck his foot out for all to see. “See there, I only got two toes on this foot; the other three was bit off by a catfish I was tryin’ to noodle out from under a rock. I caught ’im though, and cooked ’im for supper.” He turned and began to rummage through a smaller box near the boiler. After a couple minutes he pulled out a jar and brought it over so those on board could see what was in it. “See there in the jar? Them’s my three toes the catfish bit off. I caught ’im and opened ’is gizzard up and took ’em out. Put ’em in a jar o’ alcohol, and I charges people twenty-five cents to see them toes. Don’t worry, I ain’t gonna charge y’all, since you give me a fine dinner.”

He looks at Brother-in-law in a curious way, “I don’t s’pose you saved that ear you lost. I’d be willin’ to pay, say, four or five dollars for it. Why, I could get four bits a person to show them both.”

A little stunned and not saying a word, Brother-in-law shook his head indicating he didn’t have the ear.

Jack thought to himself, *No, he ain’t got it, but I have a pretty good idea where it is.*

Catfish replaced the moccasin and held up his hand so Jack could pull him back aboard. "Well, Catfish, how far downriver you goin'?" Jack asked.

"Ain't goin' no farther; only reason I come this far was 'cause o' that fine food I been smellin' upriver." He pointed toward a couple cage-looking things that were made from creek willow branches. "See them there things? Those are turtle traps, and I got a couple dozen set upriver near small creeks that feed into the main river. I'll work my way back upriver collectin' 'em and whatever I caught, I'll make my way back to Pittsburgh and sells my trappin's. I reckon that'll take a week or two."

Ell, having completed cleaning up now that Catfish finished eating, said, "At two dollars a head, it looks like you have a pretty good haul there, Mr. Catfish."

Catfish didn't answer for a moment. He was busy looking for the bottle of whiskey he knew Jack had somewhere nearby. "Uh, well, yes'um, I guess so. A good load should fetch me near seventy-five dollars, if I sell 'em to the rest'rants. Most likely, they won't want 'em all so I'll take 'em to the market and sell 'em. May only get fifty cents to a dollar for 'em there at the market. I'm hopin' them rich folks is in the mood for some Ohio River turtle soup." He wiped his mouth as if he'd just eaten something, but it wasn't eating he was thinking about. "Captain, you got anymore o' that store-bought whiskey? That rabbit was a little dry, and I'm near parched. No offense, missy,

rabbit always did affect me like that.” Ell suspected most everything made this little man parched for a drink.

Jack found the bottle and poured Catfish another drink as he sat down on a small barrel near the side of the boat. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a plug of tobacco. He placed it in his mouth and with what teeth he had left, he commenced to twist and pull off a piece for a chew.

“Catfish, how much further upriver till we get to the Davis Dam?” Jack asked.

Catfish didn’t answer for a moment as he struggled to work the hard plug into a soft chewable piece of tobacco. After about a minute, he leaned over the side and spat his mouthful of tobacco juice into the water with such force that it landed with a splashing sound when it hit the water alongside the boat.

“That damnable dam, all it does is make my movin’ up and down the river harder. Do ya’ know them sons-o’-bitches wanted me t’ pay t’ lock through one time? Me, Catfish Rob, the meanest, orneriest frontiersman left on the river. If them fellers knowed me, why, they oughtta paid me to have me go through that unnatural creation blockin’ the free-flowin’ water o’ God’s good river. Why, I was savin’ men’s lives off the Sultana steamer before most o’ them fellers workin’ there even seen their first daylight.”

Jack forgot his question for the moment. “You were on the Sultana when she went down?”

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Catfish leaned over the side and again spat into the river. "Went down, hell, Captain! She blew herself and over a thousand good Yankee boys to kingdom come that day. I heared later three of 'er four boilers blew apart. I was sittin' near the stern, asleep against a cotton bale when all hell broke loose. It happened sometime after midnight. I reckon that bale o' cotton I was sleepin' by protected me from the heat and fire. We pulled 'burned men from the cold water onto the back deck. Most were burnt real bad. I'd been in Andersonville for nine months and figured I'd never see anything that bad again. I was wrong. I seen some things that night I'd like to forget, but they still comes to me sometimes. The boat was a blazin' away, and a light wind comes from the west pushin' the flames to the starboard side. I 'member lookin' up at the hot embers flyin' and I seen her two tall stacks shootin' flames into the dark sky. Musta been over two hundred feet, them flames feedin' up from her innards was racin' toward the heavens. Trouble was, no angels come that night to help all those fellers that was lost. Iffin' I pass the renderin' plant on the Allegheny sometimes, that wretched smell brings back that night."

Jack poured Catfish another glass of whiskey without him asking, and it sat there for a minute while Catfish stared at the lantern's flame. "Enough about the old days. Where'd you say you folks was goin'?" With that, he picked up the glass and slowly drank the whiskey.

“We’re headed to the Davis Dam to see a man about some work downriver. You never did say how far it was from here.”

Catfish finished his drink and spat into the river again. “Most likely you folks’ll be there by midmornin’. Careful now, below the dam about a hundred yards the river shallows up right quick. The water comin’ over top washes out below the dam and carries the sediment downriver a piece where the current drops it out to the bottom when the current slows. If you look, you c’n see the ripple in the surface. Best you put in just south of the dam on a sandbar of a little creek. Good water there and a soft sandy bottom. Current ain’t strong and won’t push your boat up against the bank. Who you be seein’ there?”

Jack poured himself a small glass of whiskey and pulled a cigar from his pocket. “Lookin’ for a guy named Jeremiah Adams.”

“You lookin’ for frogman, ain’t ya? I’ll be dammed. You got any more o’ them stogies, Captain?”

Jack turned to Billy and held out his hand and Billy placed one in his hand. Catfish half stood up from the barrel and reached for the cigar. Jack held it out to him and then pulled it back, “First tell me about this Adams, and why do you call him frogman?”

Catfish took his hand and rubbed his mouth like he was wanting more to drink. Jack sat back, “You tell me what I wanna know and I’ll give you a cigar and somethin’ to help with that parched mouth.”

Catfish sat back down on the barrel and leaned forward. “Well, he’s half-crazy if you be askin’ me. You see, this guy puts a metal

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bucket-lookin' thing on his head, ties some weights 'round his middle and jumps into the river and goes down deep to work. The only thing savin' 'im is a rope around his waist and a hose with air bein' pumped down to him from above. If the good Lord'd meant for man to work underwater He'd a givin' us gills."

Jack half reached the cigar toward Catfish. "How do you know so much about how this underwater man works?"

"'Cause I worked the air pump for 'im one time when the steamer Adirondack sunk just below the locks after it hit a sunkin' snag. She was sittin' in about seven or eight feet with her top decks above water. Them salvager fellers sunk two deep-walled barges next to 'er—one on the port side and one on the starboard side of the steamer. Adams put on 'is rig and eased down onto 'er deck and lashed the big barges to the steamer's deck kevels. Once they was secured, them fellers up on deck started pumpin' water outta the barges. As the water came out, it begun to lift 'er off the bottom and soon they floated the steamer again. Once she was afloat, he went under the damaged boat and made temporary repairs so a tow could take 'er back to Pittsburgh for fixin'. The salvage company paid me fifty dollars for two days' work. Usually takes me near a month trappin' to make that kind o' money. Adams is a real nice feller, but I still say he's crazy to go down there with just a bucket on his head."

Jack handed Catfish the cigar and poured him another drink. "Best you be drinkin' up; mornin's comin' soon, and we need to get a good night's sleep before movin' upriver in the mornin'."

Billy looked at Jack as he stood, "Jack, how 'bout we lay some tarps on the deck tonight to sleep on? Those cabins'll be hot as hell." Jack nodded.

Billy and Brother-in-law began rolling a couple canvas tarps onto the front deck to make it a little softer to lie on. Brother-in-law found an old coat and rolled it into a makeshift pillow and handed it to Ell. "Ma'am, this'll be a little softer than them deck boards." Ell smiled as she made her way to the far side of the canvas. She straightened the wrinkles and carefully placed the pillowed coat on the tarp. Joshua curled up with Sunny near the front of the boat next to a coil of rope that he used as a pillow.

Billy and Brother-in-law just lay down on the tarp and put their hands behind their heads for pillows. Old Catfish lay down on the deck next to his boat and was soon asleep. The large chew of tobacco was still in his cheek.

Jack made his way back up to the wheelhouse and made a quick inspection of his boat before retiring for the night. He walked forward on the top deck and looked down on his friends who were sleeping under the night sky. He looked up into the night and saw a shooting star speed across the sky as the frogs in the distance again began to sing their songs of love. Jack lay down on the night's dew-covered deck and felt the coolness of the dampness. He stared up wondering about tomorrow and before he could think about it too much, sleep came upon him.

Chapter 13

Frogman

The smell of wood smoke woke Jack up from one of the best night's sleep he'd had in weeks. It took a moment for him to get his wits about him and sit up to see what was going on. Rubbing his eyes, he looked down on deck and could see Ell was awake and so were Billy and Brother-in-law. Joshua was still sleeping, and the big yeller dog lay at his side watching as people were moved around on deck. Catfish was on his boat working up a head of steam, and Jack realized the smoke from his old boiler was what woke him from his slumber.

"Where you goin', Catfish?" Jack called down to the man in the odd-looking workboat.

"You city people might have time to sleep away the better part o' the day, but I got turtles to catch and sell. Best I be gettin' upriver. Good luck to ya."

Ell appeared on deck, went to the edge of the boat, and offered the buckskinned man a small feed sack with a whiskey bottle of hot coffee and a tin with warm beans inside. "Mr. Catfish, you be careful and don't lose any more toes."

The old man walked over and smiled as he took the small sack with the items inside. "Ma'am, most fine ladies don't want near old

Catfish. But you be different. I'm proud to've made your acquaintance and your friends' acquaintances."

Ell smiled as Catfish took the bag. He held the bag for a moment and then kind of gently shook it up and down. Ell grinned, "There might be somethin' in there for a parched man who wants a good stogie to settle his nerves. One question, Mr. Catfish, what's your real name?"

The old man leaned toward the lady and said in a hushed tone, "I was born Robert Jackson, ma'am, out of Tennessee on the banks of the Clinch River."

Ell in a similar tone whispered, "Good fishing, Mr. Jackson."

The two smiled at each other and then he carefully set the bag on top of the wooden box full of turtles. Closing a couple valves and throwing a couple more logs on the fire, Robert Jackson and the boat from Tennessee started back out into the river. "You'ens be good, folks. May the Good Lord give you fair skies and deep water under your keel." With that, he waved his hand and opened another valve. The small boat began making that strange sound as it turned upriver, "chug-chug-chug-chug," and the small green-colored paddles began pushing the early morning water away from the stern.

Jack turned and looked at his own boat's stack and could see dark smoke billowing into the morning sky. His damp clothes were a little uncomfortable, but he knew they'd soon dry in the air. He was hungry and could smell the scent of coffee coming from below.

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The river was busy. Two packet boats and a side-wheeler steamer already had passed this morning. Jack knew he had to get his boat off the sandbar before the wash from a boat pushed the Mary E into a bad angle making it harder to move back into the main channel. He ran down the steps and saw Billy and Brother-in-law working the boiler. "Jack, the pressure's about there; if you wanna try and move us outta here, you can in about ten to fifteen minutes," Billy told him. Jack nodded then turned and looked upriver. He could see to the next bend and could just make out Catfish's boat moving along the far side of the river. He didn't know why, but he'd enjoyed the old man's company last night. Couldn't say he enjoyed his personal hygiene.

About then, Ell appeared from the far side of the boiler with a cup of coffee, some fresh biscuits, and a small bottle of honey she'd purchased with yesterday's supplies.

"How in the world did you make biscuits on the side of the boiler?" Before she could answer, Billy and Brother-in-law were helping themselves to the hot treats. Jack felt a cold nose on his hand. Sunny had left his master's side for some biscuits too.

"I just mixed 'em up and put 'em in the cast iron pot you had upstairs in that old abandoned galley," Ell explained.

Jack asked, "Billy, did you know we had an iron pot like that upstairs?"

Before he could answer, Ell spoke up, "As unorganized as most o' this boat is, it's not likely you know half o' what's on here. I'd guess it's been in the cabinet since the original owner put it there."

It wasn't long before Joshua came to investigate the warm smell of biscuits in the morning air. Billy stepped back next to the boiler and looked at the pressure gauge. "Jack, she's up to pressure. You can ease 'er out in the river now."

Jack finished his biscuit and looked for the water bucket on a rope that sat near the front deck. He looked at Ell and said, "Good, but sticky." He tossed the bucket into the water, retrieved it, and began washing his hands in it. The others soon followed, and Joshua asked for another biscuit for him and his dog.

Jack picked up his coffee cup and started toward the stairs, "Brother-in-law, you go to the far corner and watch to make sure we don't kick up some junk off the bottom. Joshua, you do the same on this side. Call out if you see any problems. Ell, go forward to make sure the front is comin' off clean from the bar. All right, let's get the Mary E back into the river and headin' north."

Everyone went to the assigned areas and waited for the boat to begin to move. Jack picked up his coffee cup and went up to the pilothouse. He positioned the wheel to bring the boat off the sandbar and move toward the starboard side. He next looped the rope over one of the handles on the wheel to hold it secure in position when they began moving out in the muddy river. He secured the wheel to make sure the rudders would hold position

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while he kept a lookout for any problems from the people down on deck. Having made ready, he pulled the talking tube and blew down to Billy below. Billy quickly answered, "Yeah, Jack, you ready?" Jack responded he was.

Billy slowly opened the main valve and allowed steam to flow to the piston engine to drive the connecting shaft to start the paddle turning. The boat seemed to hold fast as the paddles began pushing water along her sides and onto the sandy bank below the boat's bow. The water became muddy and turbulent. Jack stepped out on the side deck and called down to Ell, "Can you see if she's a movin' yet?"

Ell looked over the bow toward the muddy water below and shook her head toward Jack. The boat was still stuck fast in her sandy resting place. Jack once again blew into the speaking tube, "Billy, give 'er more steam!"

In a moment, Jack could sense the paddles were pushing water harder as the bucket board dipped faster into the water behind the boat. Jack looked down at Ell and she once again indicated no movement.

This time, Jack moved the bridge telegraph 'FULL ASTERN' down to Billy. This time, Jack could feel the power of the paddles digging into the water as down below Billy added more steam. The backwash of water from the paddles was rolling onto the shore in front of the boat, and the paddle was throwing water high and onto the back roof of the boat. If anyone had been in the privy on the

back deck, most likely he would've gotten wet from the torrent of water rolling off her back roof down onto the small enclosure.

Jack began moving the rudders slowly to the left and then to the right. He did this a couple times, and he could tell the stern of the boat was starting to move. The trick was not to move her too close to shore on the port side.

Jack was about ready to call down to Billy and tell him to tie off the safety and give her all the steam possible until they got to moving. But about then, Ell signaled up to Jack she could see a little movement. The Mary E came off all at once and headed hard for the far bank of the river. Jack telegraphed down to the engine room, 'ALL STOP,' and he untied the wheel to help steer the boat as it now moved out into the main river.

He looked back and could see the paddles were no longer throwing water onto the deck. He moved the big wheel and rudders, straightening the path of the boat as it coasted back into the river.

Jack stepped out and checked with Brother-in-law, then Joshua, to make sure everything was okay. He then waved to Ell to come on up to the wheelhouse. When he looked at Brother-in-law, he could tell something was wrong on his side of the paddle wheel. Jack stepped out onto the deck to get a better look at the stern. Brother-in-law was signaling Jack to come back to the paddle area. Jack looked around and made sure the boat wasn't in danger of moving into shallow water too quickly. When he knew it would be okay to

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leave the wheelhouse for a few minutes, headed toward the back deck.

“What’s wrong?” he asked Brother-in-law. Before he could answer, he saw parts of the bucket board lying on the back deck. The force of the water against the damaged board that he’d seen at Tilley’s dock had broken under the pressure.

“Jack, we lost two boards. Gonna make ’er handle hard till we can repair ’em.” Jack looked at the damaged pieces and could see there were a couple pieces still attached to the metal assembly. Those would have to be removed before going on upstream.

“Joshua, come over here.” In a few seconds, the boy and dog appeared. “Joshua, go up to the boiler room an’ get a hammer an’ chisel from Billy, an’ be quick about it.”

By now Ell had come back to see what was wrong. “She finished bustin’ the boards that were damaged. Gonna have to get them loose so they don’t jam up and break any more.” Jack explained to Ell.

It wasn’t long until the boy returned with the tools. Jack removed his shoes and started over the side and down on the board just below the water’s surface. The boards were slippery from the green algae that grew on them. “C’n I help?” Joshua asked.

“Yeah, come on down and be careful you don’t slip through the boards. Don’t want you to get stuck down there.”

The boy moved quickly down onto the boards and over next to Jack. “Son, hold the piece o’ board up while I get the chisel against the bolt and cut it off.” Joshua held up the board and Jack began

hitting the chisel with the hammer. The sound of metal to metal echoed off the nearby hillsides. It wasn't long until the first piece of wood was loose. Jack told the boy to hand it up to Brother-in-law so it wouldn't be in the way.

Next, they started on the second piece. It was lower down and made getting the right angle on the chisel hard. Jack had to end up sitting down on the board underwater to get a good angle to cut off the last bolt. This time, the bolt was harder to cut or the angle still wasn't right. Finally, the metal bolt cut, and the board was free. Joshua carefully handed the slippery board up to Brother-in-law.

"Let's get up outta here before we slip an' fall in." Joshua carefully worked his way along the board toward the side. When he got there, he turned and held out his hand to help Jack to the edge. The two stepped onto the metal wheel supports and were soon back on deck. "Well I didn't intend t' get a mornin' bath, but I guess it won't hurt a thing."

Ell looked down at the missing boards. "Jack, will that make a difference?"

"Yeah, it'll make 'er harder to steer. She'll wanna push the bow toward the starboard side o' the river. I'll have t' steer 'er heavy t' the port, but we'll be okay. It ain't the first time I piloted a boat with broken bucket boards. Let's get a goin' upriver. Wanna be at the dam by noon."

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Jack picked up his shoes and headed toward the wheelhouse. "Come on Ell, I might need a hand pilotin' this here boat this mornin'." Ell smiled. She knew he needed no help.

Before going up, Jack stuck his head into the boiler room. "Billy, we broke them two boards we seen the other night. We got anythin' t' make repairs when we get upriver?"

"Not sure. I'll check when we get t' goin'."

Jack hurried up the steps followed by Ell. He looked up and down the river and could see no boat traffic. He moved the telegraph to 'HALF AHEAD.' The Mary E began her upriver travel again.

Jack could tell, right off, the boards made a big difference in how she steered. He'd have to keep a firm hand on the big wheel to keep her on course with the uneven drive from the paddles. The steamer moved over the water a little sideways to stay on course as she started upstream.

After a few minutes, he got the feel of how much angle he had to keep on the rudders to move upriver in a straight line even if the boat was a little sideways. He knew it would slow his travel and burn extra fuel, but it couldn't be helped. They'd make repairs at the upriver destination.

It wasn't long before Jack saw Catfish's boat tied to a tree near the mouth of a small creek. Catfish wasn't on board, but as he passed the creek Jack could see him wading in the water, and it

looked like a willow turtle trap was in his hands. He hoped the old man would have a full box by the time he got back to Pittsburgh.

Ell sat quiet and watched out the side window. The morning air through the wheelhouse moved her hair as she sat looking out over the river. Jack had never met a woman like her before. She was easy to be around. It was like he'd known her his whole life. He was puzzled how someone he met just a couple days ago could affect him like that. He'd known other women—women who wanted to change him—women who weren't as interested in him as they were in the kinds of things his money could buy. But Ell wasn't like any of them. He wasn't sure what that meant.

By nine o'clock the Mary E was making time nearly as well as if she weren't damaged. Jack's skillful hand at steering and the design of her bottom hull helped him handle the boat. Jack heard footsteps coming up the steps.

"Jack, we got two boards below deck. We need two more t' fix 'er right, but if we put the two boards we have in a couple o' the empty slots, she should be good till we get home for better repair."

Billy looked out the front toward the river. "See that big rock over there? We ain't far from the dam. I remember that from past trips upriver. The old man must have figured we'd be traveling at his boat's rate of speed when he told us it would take till midmornin'." Billy was right, and as they came around the bend they saw a big steamer beginning to move out of the lock chamber on the left side of the river.

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Jack had seen the dam before on his upriver travels but was always surprised to see it there when he returned. Figured the river in one of its springtime floods would wash it downriver. But it still held the river back, making it easier for boats to navigate upriver in the low water times. Some said one day dams would be holding the river back all the way down to Mississippi. He figured if they ever did that, the riverboats might give the railroad a run for its money again.

“There, over there. That sandbar. Ain’t that the place Catfish said to put her aground?” Ell asked while looking out the window.

Jack could see she was right. But he could also see the ripples in the water just ahead, from where the water coming over the dam formed a shallow place in slower current. The water then flowing overtop of the shallow place increased the current making it harder for him to steer a damaged boat at an angle toward the sandbar. He needed to get close enough to see where the current faded so he’d know where it was safe to put his boat into shore.

Jack turned to Billy who was just leaving the wheelhouse. “Billy, when you get down there release the clutch on the port side a little, puttin’ most of the drive on the starboard. That should make it easier to work into shore.”

Billy stepped back into the wheelhouse and looked out at the water. “Jack, don’t put too much pressure on the starboard paddle. You already got two pieces missin’, and that’d put a heap o’ pressure on the remainin’ boards.”

“Yeah, I know, but the shallow river current’s makin’ this hard. I can make this work. Don’t worry.”

“Wasn’t worried, just don’t want you makin’ any more work for me and Brother-in-law.” The two men laughed as Billy headed back down below.

It wasn’t long until Jack could feel the power drop off from the port paddle. What he hoped was that by reducing the power on the port side, it would more closely equal the power of the damaged starboard. He was right; the wheel came back to a neutral position and the boat steered straight toward the sandbar. About a hundred feet out from the bar, the downriver current faded, and his boat was no longer being pushed sideways downriver. Jack figured once he got out of the current coming over the dam it would smooth out. Jack moved the telegraph to ‘ALL STOP.’ The forward motion of the boat continued her toward the sandy bank that was coming closer each second. They must’ve been twenty feet out when she went to ground.

He waited for a minute while focusing on a water maple tree off the bow. Keeping the tree at a fixed focal point, he used it as a gauge to tell whether or not the boat was moving. He stood quiet and closely watched for about two minutes. The Mary E didn’t move. He hadn’t run her too far up onto the bar. She was good. Sitting steady.

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Jack took Ell's hand, "Come on, let's get 'er fast with a line to the big tree and go find our frogman." Ell smiled as they started down the steps.

Jack and Joshua pulled the line ashore and tied the stern of the boat to the upriver side of the sandbar. "There, she ain't a gonna move now, most likely she wasn't anyhow, but I wanted to make sure. I'm not a wantin' to go swimmin' downriver after my boat," Jack said to the boy as the big yeller dog splashed in the water around them.

Jack made his way back to the boat and helped Ell down from the bow into the shallow water. "Billy, you and Brother-in-law see if you can repair that paddle assembly. The boy and Ell will go along with me to see if that Adams feller's here. I'll check and see if by chance they have any boards they might'a fished outta the river from upstream that we can use to make repairs to the paddle assembly. Never know, we might get lucky." Billy and Brother-in-law waved and started toward the back of the boat. Jack and the others started toward the dam as the big yeller dog still played in the shallows.

The dam must've been almost a half-mile upriver from where the Mary E was aground. It lay in a straight stretch, and Jack could see that several boats were moving up and down the river from Pittsburgh. It was a busy place in the morning. Passenger steamers were numerous, but most of the river traffic in and around the Davis dam was made up of towboats pushing large wooden barges filled with coal and iron ore. Towboats and barges answered the need of

the coal mines that dug deep into the surrounding hills, by providing a cheap way to move their coal to customers for use in homes and steel furnaces. And, towboats and barges also transported large quantities of iron ore from distant mines that was needed to supply the red-hot iron furnaces of the big steel city. The dam was finished in 1885 and did what the builders had hoped. It held back the river's flowing waters and provided a steady water depth, which made it the ideal way to transport large cargo barges at an economical cost.

The path along the riverbank was well worn, indicating that Jack and his friends weren't the first to make their way toward the dam in this manner. Two sets of railroad tracks ran nearby along the upside of the river where trains passed so close to riverboats that it was almost like an insult to the steamers.

It didn't take long before the three reached the lower end of the dam wall. Jack stopped and explained to Ell and Joshua how the big boats move up and down the river with the help of the river lock. Neither Ell nor the boy had ever seen anything like this before.

In the chamber was a tow barge pushing a couple barges of coal and a couple barges that contained metal tanks most likely filled with oil. The tow and her cargo sat quietly inside the chamber. She was sitting at the lower river level when the three first saw her. Black smoke was billowing from her twin stacks as she waited for the water to lift her to the upper river level. As they watched, at first it seemed the boat wasn't moving, but Jack told the two, "Watch the wet line

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on the concrete wall. You'll see the water level rising to that point and raising the boat along with it."

As they watched, they realized Jack was right. The boat was rising along with the water that filled the chamber. "How do they do that, Jack?" Joshua asked.

"Not real sure, but I know operators can fill the chamber while a boat's in it and raise it to the upper river level, or they can drain the water out to lower the level to below the dam's level. It looks like it takes several men to make the thing work. Before the dam was built, in late summer the river channel was sometimes no more than a quarter of what it is now. The dam made the river level steady for boats to travel more months out of the year. They say the government's going to build dams clear to the Mississippi. Take a heap o' work and money to hold this old river back."

A few minutes later, the boat's rise stopped, along with the incoming water. The gates were moved, and a signal was given to the pilot. In a few moments, the wheel of the paddle began to turn and pushed the boat forward. It didn't take long for the barge and its tow to move out of the long concrete chamber and on its way upriver.

"Come on, let's see if we can find this guy who works under the river with a bucket on 'is head," Jack said as he started toward the small building near the middle of the dam wall.

The dam was a busy place, both on the structure itself and the water around it. Several boats were holding position upriver waiting for their turn in the chamber. On the far side, a quarter-mile below

the dam, were the remains of a steamer that had burned in the not too distant past. The captain apparently had run her ashore before she was consumed by flames. Joshua and Ell were fascinated by the busy place and the work that was going on to move traffic up and down the river. Jack went off, headed toward a group of men moving trees and snags from above the dam.

“Mornin’. Would one o’ you fellers be able t’ tell me where I can find Jeremiah Adams?”

A big man with a full face of whiskers and a dark tan was the first to speak. “Who be a lookin’ for Jeremiah? You ain’t come callin’ t’ collect money, are ya?”

Jack took two steps toward the big man. Closed the distance to about three feet. Ell saw the other men’s faces turn hard when Jack stepped close. Looked like they figured this guy was looking for trouble or no good.

Jack stuck his hand toward the big man and said, “Good mornin’ to ya, friend. It looks like you fellers do a heap o’ hard work in the day’s hot sun. My name is Jack Dulin, come upriver from Parlorton. Got need of a good man to go down underwater to do some salvage work downriver.”

From near the back of the small group of men, a sandy-haired fellow asked, “How’d you say you come to be lookin’ for this Adams feller?”

“Didn’t say. I just asked if you seen him.”

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The big man took one step toward Jack and looked down at him. "My friend asked how you come t' be lookin' for Adams?"

"Mudder said he was the best frogman on the river." The group of men stood silent for a moment and then they all turned and returned to work without saying a word. All except the sandy-haired man.

"You know Mudder?"

Jack smiled and nodded that he did. "Didn't know I'd made his acquaintance many years ago during the war, but seems he remembered me."

"You ain't lookin' for sunken treasure or Linclon's gold or anything like that, are you? Or maybe Mudder's got you chasin' one o' his shady deals?"

Jack looked around toward Ell and Joshua, and then turned to the sandy-haired man. "Somewhere we can get in outta the sun and talk, Mr. Adams?"

"Yeah, over there under that oak tree we got a table set up to eat our lunches on. And, how'd you know I was Adams?"

"Didn't till now."

Ell touched Jack's arm, "Jack, you and Mr. Adams go along and talk. Me and Joshua are gonna pick some blackberries over near the tracks. Make a good pie for supper."

Jack couldn't remember the last time he had blackberry pie. Adams and Jack made their way to the makeshift table below the big

tree and sat down on two wooden boxes. "You ever do any underwater salvage work, Jack?"

"No, I can't say I have. Done a lot o' salvage work with boats and cranes. Spent a good bit o' time workin' snag-pullers for the government. I have, on occasion, had t' go into the water to attach a liftin' cable when it couldn't be done from a boat. But never worked underwater like Mudder says you can."

"Close your eyes," Adams told Jack. "Now, stand up and make your way around the tree you're sittin' beside. And don't open your eyes."

Jack didn't understand why, but did what Adams instructed him to do. He closed his eyes and stood up. Slowly, with his arms stretched out in front of him to feel his way around the tree, he began. It didn't take long before he tripped over a root that was just above the sand. He grabbed for where he knew the tree was, and missed his grip and fell to the ground. He could hear Adams laughing.

"Well, now you've had your laugh, what was that all about?"

"When you work underwater in the river, that's kinda what it's like, except it's not black like when you had your eyes closed. It's dark green, and you can't see much—most times, no more than a foot or two in front of yourself. You wear a twenty-pound helmet with a small window in front and one on each side that you can turn your head to see out of, but the moisture from your breath fogs up the glass, making it hard to see. The bottom's littered with snags, old

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ropes, and cables to get your feet tangled in. It's a hell of lot harder than tryin' to walk around that tree. A frogman's job is hard and dangerous work."

"Why do they call you frogman?" Jack asked as he sat back down on the wooden box.

"When I was workin' for the government, buildin' this here dam, they came up with a green rubberized suit to protect me in the cooler water. Trouble was, it leaked so much it had as much water on the inside as outside sometimes. The guys workin' here got to laughin' at me and callin' me frogman because of that green suit. It kinda stuck. I don't mind, I've been called worse. I got my degree in geology, studyin' rocks and ground structure. My first job was workin' with an old geologist who studied river bottoms for bridge abutments. He studied the rocks along the shore and took ground samples. Bein' young, I figured the best place to get soil samples was on the bottom where the foundation was gonna be placed. Found out I couldn't breathe underwater like a fish, so I did a little research and found out somethin' about diving equipment. Well, the rest you probably know. Did the geology work for the dam and then stayed on for the construction. Every now and then I take on a job for the railroad or a bridge foundation survey. Mostly, I just work at the dam." Jeremiah adjusted the wooden box he was sitting on and moved a little closer to Jack. "All right, Jack, you didn't come all this way to ask about my history. What're you wantin' to go after?"

"A few days back, a steamer went aground south of Moundsville. It was a piracy job that went bad, and she went down before the cargo could be gotten off. One o' the boat's crew is a brother-in-law to Billy, a man who works with me on the river. He didn't know about the piracy at the time and figured it would be a good salvage if we got to 'er quick. When we arrived, the boat was sittin' badly on a sandbar and was in danger of rollin' over. We managed to salvage whiskey, boxes of cigars, and a small wooden box we thought was full of gold coins. During the salvage she broke in half and the bow section rolled under my boat and the stern floated off downriver and, I believe, sank. The section that rolled below my boat lifted it up and out of the water, nearly sinkin' my boat. Then, what I thought was bottom gas exploded, destroyin' the wrecked bow section below my boat. Scared the hell outta me and my crew. Not sure what was on the boat that caused that. Mudder said somethin' about a new compound that can make a light burn—and he figures that's what was on board that caused the explosion."

"Carbide," Jeremiah said with certainty. "Calcium carbide. A new chemical substance that when mixed with water gives off a gas called acetylene. Damn stuff is high explosive when mishandled. A big shipment was stolen from a warehouse in Pittsburgh a while back. I wondered what happened to it. So Jack, if the boat blew up, what do you need me for?"

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“The stern section broke off and walked downriver on its paddle wheel. I figure I know where she came to rest from my days workin’ on a snag puller in that area.”

“What’s so special about the stern section, besides its top section should be visible above water in this river?”

Jack thought for a minute, *Should I tell him what happened to the stern?* Jack reasoned he had little choice at this time. “In a big turn, the river has washed out the bottom makin’ it much deeper than the rest o’ the river around it. We did soundings durin’ the snag pulling, and it’s nearly fifty to sixty feet deep.”

Jeremiah sat back on the wooden box and shook his head, “Sixty feet. Did you say sixty feet? Why, no man on this river, includin’ me, has ever dived that deep! Hell, at that depth the water won’t be dark green, it’ll be almost black. Can’t be done. Nope, can’t be done. Besides, a man would get the deep sickness and maybe die. Nope, it can’t be done.”

“Can you teach me to do this divin’ thing? I’m strong and not afraid o’ the deep water. Could you show me how, and where to get the equipment?” Jack looked Adams straight in the eyes.

“Why are you so determined to do this crazy thing when I told you it’s impossible?”

“It’s because of something we found in a small wooden box and what Mudder told me about the man who wants the new machines that made what was in the box.”

Adams stood up and walked a few steps away from Jack and rubbed his chin with his hand. "Are you crazy or just plain stupid? What's so all-fired important as to what Mudder told you? And, what's in the box?"

Jack stood up and walked closer to Adams. "Nails were in the box. A new type o' nail that'll revolutionize the nail business. Sunken inside the stern section of that boat is the machines that made 'em."

Adams acted like a man with nowhere to go. He paced quickly back and forth, mumblin' to himself. "These nail machines, did they get stolen from a warehouse in Pittsburgh too?"

Jack indicated to the man who was still pacing back and forth that they did.

"Those Confederate sons-o'-bitches killed a good friend o' mine that taught me about the river and nearly raised me after my parents died." He paced back and forth, making a track in the sand beneath the tree. "Mudder. How does Mudder fit into this?" Adams demanded.

"I went to him for answers t' what was on the boat. He told me o' the robberies and the killin's in Pittsburgh and that a group o' men known as the Order o' Southern Liberty were responsible. Those confederate sons-o'-bitches you mentioned a few minutes ago. They had some idea o' stealin' the machines, taking 'em south and buildin' more, and takin' over the nail business for the world; only it would be to raise the confederate flag again with the money. They have some

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plan to rise up again—not with a war—but by buildin’ business with one goal—use the money to buy the South and turn it into a place that practices their ideals.”

“Mudder won’t know all that. How do you know what they want to do?”

“Some from Mudder, and the rest from a man known as Charles Bourdon. He’s the head of the OSL in the Ohio Valley. He’s lookin’ for the stern section most likely as we speak. But he don’t know what I know about the river.” Jack stood for a moment and waited while the sandy-haired man absorbed what he’d been told. “One other thing—the men who own the nail machines, legal, have offered a big reward for their return. It should be enough that we all can take it easy for a long while.”

“Yeah, but that reward is sixty feet down inside a wrecked boat that you don’t have any idea of how it ended up on the bottom. Hell, it may have rolled over in the deep place; no way can we get them machines out if that happened. And this Bourdon feller, if I’m thinkin’ right, he ain’t wantin’ to let us get to ’em either. Crazy, this is just plain crazy. Can’t be done. Can’t be done.” Adams paced back and forth mumbling to himself.

Jack stopped him, saying, “You don’t have to go; just help me to get the information and equipment to try. I’m willin’ to take the risk for the money and to pay a man back for a piece o’ lead he gave me nearly thirty years ago.”

Adams looked at Jack with a question in his eyes, "Piece o' lead? What are you talking about?"

"Durin' the war, Bourdon put a lead bullet in my chest at Buffington Island. Mudder pulled me to safety after I was shot. Don't remember Mudder, but I remember that face of the confederate who shot me point-blank. Bourdon."

Adams pointed downriver toward Jack's boat, "I'm guessin' that's your boat down on the sandbar?"

"Yeah, she's the Mary E. Salvaged 'er some years back. Good boat and good crew."

Adams turned, looked downriver, and didn't say anything for a few moments. "Besides you, the lady and the boy, how many other crewmen do you have?"

Jack smiled at Adams, "Two."

"Two? Did you say two?" He started pacin' wildly again in the sand and mumbling to himself. "Sixty feet, two crew, damn confederate crazies, and a captain who's the craziest of all. Why am I even thinkin' about doin' it? Walk away; just walk away, Adams."

Jack stood and watched the frantic man pace back and forth. After a few minutes, he stopped and again looked south toward the boat with his arms folded.

Jack walked up beside him and looked south at his boat. "Well, Frogman, when are we leavin' to go downriver?"

Adams shook his head, "I'm as crazy as you. We'll leave in the mornin'."

Chapter 14

Crown for the Mary E

The early morning fog was still hanging over the water below the dam. Just off in the distance, the sound of boats moving over the river could be heard. Two short blasts on the small dam whistle gave the signal to a boat's captain when he could move in or out of the lock chamber. Most captains sounded an acknowledgment with the boat's whistle. This simple means of communication worked well for the many boats that passed through the dam.

Jack and Billy were up early replacing the second set of boards on the starboard paddles. Adams had given them a couple boards recovered from in front of the dam that would work to fill the missing bucket boards. Getting them cut to the correct length and drilling the holes for the bolts took most of the early morning hours.

"Billy, this'll get us back up to full drive power for the downriver run. You know, I was thinkin'. Remember that old dish boat they used to sell medicine out of along the river? Someone run it aground just above Miller's crossin' and abandoned it."

Billy indicated he remembered the old store boat. Dish boats were used as floating stores that made their way downriver with no power. They drifted with the current and stopped in the towns along the way to sell their wares to the people who lived along the river. Some of the nicer boats had a paddle assembly that could swing out

into the river and the proprietor of the floating store peddled it like a bicycle to move it in the direction he wanted it to go. When they sold most of their wares, or fall weather was coming on, they contracted with a boat going upriver, and the boats' owners returned home to restock their stores. When the weather was good again, they started their next downriver trip.

"If we c'n bargain for that boat, we c'n use it as a work barge. We c'n hide the divin' equipment and other hardware inside the old cabin. Brother-in-law used to be good at sign paintin'. Does he still keep his hand in it?"

Billy had a funny look on his face, "Yeah, but why would we need a work barge, can't we salvage the wreck with just the Mary E?"

Jack finished tightening the last bolt on the bucket board. "You said yourself a couple times, everyone knows this boat by its twin paddles and single stack. Can't do anything about the two paddles, but remember that burned-out steamer we seen downriver below the dam? Weren't much left of 'er 'cept the metal work. Both of 'er stacks were lyin' next to 'er in the water. If we was to take a couple o' sections and make it look like we had a bigger stack with a fancy crown on top, it might throw people off when they see the Mary E comin'. And if we're pushin' that old dish b^oat and your brother-in-law was to paint on the side, 'Dr. Hardgrave's, Dentist' no one will suspect it's us. Buy us some time to locate and salvage the Boston. Don't forget, the authorities and Bourdon will be lookin' for us. We need to try an' go unnoticed."

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“Jack, I hate to tell you this, but if we go downriver with that painted on the boat, somebody’s gonna wanna have a tooth pulled.”

Jack smiled, “I thought about that too. If that happens, we’ll have Ell wrap her head in a white cloth, all redded up with paint or somethin’. She’ll come screamin’ outta the door that the doctor’s tryin’ to kill ’er. Anyone wantin’ to see the dentist is already scared, an’ when Ell comes screamin’ out covered in blood, they won’t be able to get up the riverbank quick enough.”

Billy smiled, “Yeah, that’d work. It’s a crazy plan, but it’ll most likely work.” The two men climbed onto the back deck and pulled the tool bucket aboard. “What now, Jack?”

Brother-in-law looked at the two men and inquired, “What dish boat and why do we need one anyhow? I thought we were goin’ after the Boston.” Jack ignored his questions and gave an order.

“We’ll back off the sandbar and make our way to the outside of the lock chamber wall. See, over there near the end, Adams has moved his equipment down there so we can load it on board.”

Joshua and Sunny sat on the support deck near the paddle watching the two men work on the boards. Jack turned to the boy as he finished putting the tools in the bucket. “Joshua, do ya think you and Sunny could untie the shore line and pull it aboard?”

Almost before Jack had the words out, the two were running up the deck toward the front of the boat. Billy looked over at Jack, “I guess they wanted a reason to jump off the front o’ the boat into the water.”

Brother-in-law met the two on the side deck just in front of the boiler room door. "Steam pressure's up and I greased the bearin' on the connectin' shaft. The packin' on the midboat rudder is leakin'. Not sure if the shaft ain't bent some after the explosion. I repacked it with oakum and grease and tightened the packin' pusher down. Still leakin' some. Have to keep an eye on it."

Billy set the bucket of tools just inside the door before turning to Brother-in-law. "You got any paint and brushes on board?"

Brother-in-law rubbed the side of 'is head where 'is ear used to be, "I think I seen some stuff like that in the back cabin. Not sure how old it is, why? You wantin' me to paint this boat?"

"No Jack's got a plan to try and hide our identity and he needs you to paint a sign."

Brother-in-law just looked at Billy and Jack. "I don't know how paintin' this boat'll hide us from what's downriver."

Jack started up the steps to the wheelhouse and looked down at Brother-in-law. "Ain't paintin' the boat, but might paint a sign on an old dish boat we might pick up along the way."

Jack went on up the steps and Billy motioned for Brother-in-law to follow him to the front deck. "Come on, let's give Joshua a hand pullin' the shore line aboard."

"Aren't you gonna tell me what's goin' on?" Brother-in-law asked.

"Later. Come on, let's get goin'."

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Joshua had untied the line and was dragging it back to the boat. Sunny was playing with a stick floating in the shallow warm water. Soon the rope started toward the boat as Billy and Brother-in-law began pulling it onto the front deck. Billy pulled it up and Brother-in-law coiled the rope in a neat pile on the deck.

“Come on, Joshua, you and Sunny get aboard. Jack might just leave you here.”

The two waded to the front and Joshua lifted the dog partway up and Billy pulled him the rest of the way. Joshua managed to get aboard all by himself.

Billy looked up at Jack and gave him the thumbs-up. It was time to go. Billy made his way along the deck and into the boiler room. Jack timed it about right before he blew into the speaking tube. “Billy, give the engine some steam. We’ll back ’er out and find a way in past the shallows below the dam. Send Brother-in-law to the front deck with the soundin’ rope to gauge the depth.”

Billy told Brother-in-law what Jack had said. In a minute, Brother-in-law appeared on the front deck with the weighted rope. Jack felt the paddles engage and begin pushing water under the boat. This time the boat moved off the soft bottom with no problems. Jack eased it back out into the river and pointed the bow toward an area where the water seemed to be smooth indicating deeper water.

About then, Ell came up the steps and into the cabin. “Good mornin’, Jack.” Jack smiled without saying anything as he watched Brother-in-law on the deck checking water depth.

Jack moved the telegraph to the 'FORWARD SLOW' position. The Mary E started toward the unknown water just ahead.

Brother-in-law continued throwing the weighted rope to check the water's depth. After every three or four times he retrieved the line he held up his hands and indicated the depth in front of the boat. This time he held up eight fingers indicating eight feet of water under the boat.

Slowly the boat moved toward the long concrete wall of the dam to where Adams and his equipment were waiting. Brother-in-law held up his hand with six fingers in the air. Bottom's gettin' shallow. Jack looked back behind the boat and could see that the water was being discolored by the paddle stirring up the shallow bottom mud. Six feet under the boat meant about only three under the paddle. If we lose two more feet, we'll have a problem.

The long concrete wall was coming closer and he let the boat drift toward the wall on the port side. That would make it easier for Adams to load his equipment. Brother-in-law held up just one hand this time with all five fingers outstretched. Jack knew he couldn't lose much more of the bottom below the boat.

Jack turned to Ell, "Go down on deck and get Joshua and Billy to help Adams move his equipment on board when we come up against the wall. Can't tie her off, so we'll just hold position with the paddle turnin' slow. Tell Billy to cut steam to just enough to turn the paddle about ten revolutions a minute. He'll understand." Ell nodded her head that she understood and disappeared down the steps. Again

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Brother-in-law held up one hand with five fingers outstretched. River bottom depth staying the same for the time being. In a moment, they came against the long concrete wall on her port side. Jack sensed that Billy cut the steam to about the right pressure and the boat seemed to be holding fast in the slow current.

Below on the port deck, Ell, Billy, Brother-in-law, and Joshua crossed over onto the wall and started bringing equipment on board. Most was fairly easy. Adams carefully brought aboard the cases with the diving helmets inside. Joshua picked up hoses and brought them on board and stacked them in a pile. Billy and Brother-in-law pushed the bellows-pumping mechanism to the edge of the wall. Billy then jumped aboard and swung the lifting boom over to connect the pump to the cable. Once connected, Billy began to turn the winch and raise the pump just enough to bring it on board.

The boat was now slowly beginning to lose position along the wall. The paddles weren't turning at the correct speed to hold position even in the slow current. Jack called out to the people below, "Hurry up we're beginnin' to slip downriver!"

Billy lowered the pump onto the deck and, as soon as it touched, went to help with the rest of the equipment. Jack looked toward the back of the boat and saw it was time to get the crew back on board. About the same time, he saw they'd already loaded everything on board.

"Billy, get to the engine room and give me steam when I call for it. Brother-in-law, keep check of the water depth until we clear the

wall.” The two men hurried off to their jobs. Each man knew the Mary E would have only one chance to ease out into the river and avoid the shallows below the dam.

As the boat started back, the stern port side barely touched the wall and that slight contact started the bow turning toward the starboard side. The boat was going to cross the shallows broadside to the current, and Jack could do nothing about it.

“Brother-in-law, keep checkin’ bottom. Hurry!” Jack yelled.

The boat was moving slow in the current, but it was turning more every second. Once the full slow current was against the port side, it pushed the boat toward the ripples atop the hidden shallow water downstream. Brother-in-law held up his hand, four fingers.

Jack moved the telegraph to signal down to Billy ‘DEAD SLOW ASTERN.’ He hoped he could turn the rudders enough with the paddles moving astern to move it back away from the shallow bottom. It was starting to work when the front of the boat began dragging the gravel bottom. Jack prayed that the paddles would stay above the bottom. The current was pushing them sideways over a soft bottom that could damage the boards. The boat rocked gently and Jack heard the hull sliding over the gravel bottom.

In a few seconds, the sound disappeared and Jack could see the ripples in the water just upriver. Luck had been with them. They were again in clear water as Brother-in-law held both hands with ten fingers pointing toward the blue morning sky.

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Jack closed his eyes for a moment and said a small prayer. "Thanks Lord, the Mary E is once again in Your debt." Jack realized it had to be divine protection that followed his boat—after all she'd been through and to still be afloat.

Jack looked toward where the burned-out steamer was sitting in the shallow water near the bank below the dam. He leaned out the window and called down onto deck, "Brother-in-law, I'm gonna ease her into position next to that wreck. See if you and Adams can get a cable around one of her stacks, and I'll try to pull it free with the boat." Brother-in-law looked up with a puzzled look on his face as to why they needed a burned steamer stack when they had a good one of their own, but if Jack wanted it, he'd do as he was told.

The stack on the south side looked to be free from the boat's wrecked boilers. It had most likely broken off from the intense heat during the fire. Partly hidden under water was the stack's top decorative crown. Jack was hoping it wouldn't be too badly damaged from the fire when they retrieved it.

Down on the front deck, Brother-in-law and Adams were making plans for how to get a cable around the stack that could be attached to a burned boat submerged in water. "Only one way as I see it—jump in an' take a line around the stack to the backside. Then swim under the stack and bring the line over to the boat and attach it to the liftin' cable on the boom crane. Have to move your air pump thing to the other side first," Brother-in-law told Adams.

Adams looked at the blackened stack's watery predicament and turned to Brother-in-law. "We'll need two cables around it. If we try and lift it with just one, it might collapse or the top section might hang top-heavy. If we lift it with two cables, it should hang fairly level without much chance o' crushin' the thin stackpipe under its own weight. I'll go in the water with you, an' Ell and the boy can operate the cable winch at least enough to pull it free o' the wreck." Brother-in-law nodded his understanding. Adams signaled to Jack to ease the boat in close to the wreck.

Adams explained to Ell and Joshua what they needed to do when they got the cables around the stack. Brother-in-law lifted the air pump off the deck a few inches and swung the boom around to the starboard side and returned the pump back onto the deck. Adams prepared a couple ropes and cables before giving Ell a last review of instructions. They were ready to retrieve the burned steamer's stack. Brother-in-law turned to Adams just before they were going to jump into the water. "What the hell do we need an extra stack for, anyhow?"

Adams said without turning his head, "Jack's gonna hide the boat's identity with it." Brother-in-law was now more confused than ever.

Jack signaled down to Billy in the engine room, 'DEAD SLOW AHEAD.' In a few moments, the boat was just barely moving toward the wreck. Jack signaled down to the engine room, 'SLOW ASTERN.' He turned to watch as the paddles stopped for a moment

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and then started turning in the opposite direction. The Mary E's progress stopped and he signaled down 'STOP' to the engines. The paddles went idle in the water.

Adams and Brother-in-law looked at each other in a somewhat reassuring manner, "Here we go." With those words, the two men jumped into the water and swam under the partially submerged stack. It didn't take long before both men threw their rope lines back over top making a loop around the stack. Next, they swam under the stack one more time and pulled the ropes back to the side of the Mary E. In a few minutes they threw the lines up to Ell and Joshua, who tied them to the two metal cables from the lifting winch.

Just as instructed, they started pulling the cables over and under the stack and then back to the boat. Adams and Brother-in-law positioned the cables around the stack in the best places possible to lift the metal level from the water. A little later, everything was ready, and the two men in the water gave the signal to begin cranking the winch cable to hopefully pull the stack free and onto the boat.

The clicking sound of the winch told the two men in the water the operation to retrieve the stack had started. After only a slight hesitation, the stack began making its first moves toward the Mary E. The lifting boom made a sound indicating it was taking the heavy strain of the stack as it moved slowly toward the boat. The top crown of the stack appeared above the water and Jack could see it was bent but not damaged too badly.

Muddy water with black coal dust began flowing out both ends of the stack as it moved closer toward the boat. The stack was being retrieved much easier than Jack had anticipated. But as it approached, he began to realize it was a lot bigger than he had thought. It would take up a good bit of the front deck when he brought it on board.

It wasn't long before the stack was lifted partially out of the water and hung suspended alongside the Mary E. Jack watched as Adams and Brother-in-law swam alongside toward the back of the boat to use the paddles as a way to climb back aboard the boat. Before long, Jack saw the two men appear on deck near the paddles. He signaled down to the engine room, 'BACK SLOW.' The paddles responded and the boat began to move back out into the river with its prize hanging over the port side.

Near mid-river Jack signaled 'ALL STOP' to Billy in the engine room. He checked up and down the river, but no boats were in sight for the moment. Having assessed the traffic, he hurried down onto the front deck. "Let's get that stack aboard. Move Adams's equipment inside and then we'll set it down on the deck." They all knew their jobs and quickly moved the equipment under the front deck to make room.

It didn't take long for the front deck to be cleared of the diving equipment. "Billy, you and Joshua operate the winch. Ell, stand clear for the moment. Adams, you and Brother-in-law help me guide it on deck." When everyone was in position, Jack nodded his head for

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Billy to begin. The clicking sound of the winch began as the dirty stack raised clear of the river. After a few moments, the stack was no longer touching the water. "Grab a hold and let's swing it onto the deck."

The boom made a groaning sound as it came around to position the stack midway on the front deck. "Get me a couple o' the wooden crates so I can put 'em under the stack to prevent any further damage to the crown section." Many of the fancy river steamers had atop their stacks a decorative section that resembled a royal crown. Most, when first put into service, were painted a bright gold color. It didn't take long for the coal smoke and heat to discolor it to a flat black color along with the rest of the stack.

Joshua and Ell positioned the two wooden boxes under the top section of the stack. Jack signaled to Billy, "Lower it down slowly; don't want to damage it any more than necessary." The metallic clicking of the winch started as the cable began lowering the stack onto the deck with a soft thud.

Billy walked over to where Jack was standing. "All right, we got your stack, mind tellin' me how we're gonna get it up on top of the boat?"

"Simple. We'll need the help of the railroad." They all looked at Jack with a puzzled look. He knew that not far downriver a train trestle crossed the river. "We'll use the train bridge as a way to rig a liftin' line over one of its lower supports. Lift it with the Mary E and set it down as pretty as you please. Brother-in-law, take a measure of

the stack and see how many sections of the salvaged stack we need. Cut the rivets off the unwanted sections and roll them overboard. Billy, open the main steam valve to the engine, and let's get goin' downriver."

Chapter 15

Transformation

The sounds of Brother-in-law chiseling rivets out of the unwanted part of the stack echoed through the boat. The repairs to the boat's bucket boards once again gave Jack a steady feel for handling his boat on the open river. When the Mary E was running right, she was a fine boat to handle on smooth or rough water. The design of her hull by Jones many years before was all that he had hoped it would be when handling the boat at full speed on the river. Jack could run hard into a river turn at full speed, engage the small mid-boat tiller to the underside rudders, and make as sharp a turn as any boat, big or small, on the river.

Ell sat in the chair near the starboard window and enjoyed the warm sun on her face and the cool air coming from the river. She sat smiling as she quietly looked out at the passing river. On occasion, she caught Jack stealing a look at her and smiled a little bigger when she caught him. Jack knew that, someday, Ell and he would have to talk about things. But that wasn't going to happen today.

As he listened to the hammering on the front deck, he heard footsteps coming up the side steps. "Jack, we need to talk." It was Jeremiah and he had the look of a man on a mission. "Tell me about the boat we're goin' after and what condition you think we'll find her in. I've got to work out some big details in my head on how we're

gonna try an' pull this off. Sixty feet of water, we need a good plan how to get inside and get those wooden crates out." Adams sat down on the side window-seat waiting for a response from Jack. As he did, he lit his pipe and sat back against the side of the window. He lifted one leg to rest it on the window sill and relaxed while he waited.

"The Boston broke in half just behind 'er main boilers. Brother-in-law says that boat had a cargo area between the boiler room and engine room. The engineer's cabin acted as a divide between the boiler and the cargo room. By what he describes about her insides, musta been the weak place in her design and that's where she broke apart as she rolled off the sandbar. I remember seein' a wall just inside as she ripped herself apart. I saw a wall with shelves and thought to myself how odd to see framed pictures still sittin' perfectly after she broke herself in half. If Brother-in-law's description is correct, those crates are sittin' just on the other side of that wall, lashed to the floor with heavy lines. On the outside of that room are two large cargo doors that slide out of the way. We go in through there."

Jeremiah sat quiet, looking at the oncoming river, and said nothing for a couple minutes. The smoke from his pipe swirled around his head as the air moving through the pilothouse carried it away. After what seemed like a great long time of silence, Jack asked, "Did you hear me? We can slide the doors open and get inside to the crates."

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Still, Jeremiah sat looking at the river and smoking his pipe. Then he leaned forward all at once. "Yes sir, that's what we need and this crazy plan just might work. Over there, slow this boat, we got someone to pick up, and he's gonna help us with this job."

Jack looked out and didn't see anything as he telegraphed down to Billy in the engine room, 'ALL STOP.' In a couple seconds, the telegraph answered 'ALL STOP.' Then the speaking tube whistle sounded and Jack removed the plug. "What the hell is goin' on up there, Jack? Do I vent the boiler steam off, or what? I got a full head up and the safety's about to lift."

In the background Jack heard the boiler's safety lift, and Billy was gone to deal with the high pressure. In a minute, the manual steam valve opened and excess steam was being released from the boiler. White steam shot toward the blue sky with a deafening sound from the vent pipes. Billy's voice came over the tube again, "Jack, did you hear me? What's goin' on?"

Jack looked at Jeremiah who pointed toward an opening in the riverbank that led to a small side creek. He recognized Catfish's boat just inside the mouth of the creek. "That's Catfish's boat. Whatta we need a turtle trapper for? Adams, are you out of your mind?"

"Trust me, Jack, we need Catfish. Besides, how do you know Catfish?"

Jack called down to Billy and told him to secure the boilers for the time being. "The Mary E is stoppin' and gettin' some help, or at least that's what Jeremiah says we're doin'."

Jack turned to Jeremiah, "Tell me. Why're we gonna need this man on this trip?"

Jeremiah pounded his pipe on his hand to dislodge the spent tobacco in the bowl. "Whatta you know about our turtle-huntin' friend over there?" he asked.

Jack was still taking stock of where his boat was coasting to on the open river, and the sound of venting steam from the boilers taken off-line so quickly. "I don't know; he looks like a reject from some Wild West show, a man who doesn't care about personal issues, like takin' a bath once or twice a month. How about that? Anything else I should know?"

"Yeah, that old man's a college-educated civil engineer. Class of fifty-eight, West Point. Within six months of the beginnin' of the war, Captain Jackson had organized a special unit that infiltrated confederate lines and destroyed a great deal of their infrastructure. In other words, his unit blew things up. What was so special about his unit? They destroyed bridges and military fortifications with a precision not seen before in the war. He could engineer blowin' a bridge up and not damage a nearby church or school. Somehow, he'd have his team place explosives to direct the force of the charge. Toward the end of the war, he was captured and sent to Andersonville Prison along with most of his team. At the war's end, he was aboard the Sultana when she exploded. Testified at the insurance hearin' as to what happened that night on the river."

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Jack again checked his boat's position in the river before answering. "Well he told us about the Sultana, but not about the rest. He did say he worked with you on a salvage job a while back. But still I don't know how he can help with the salvage of the Boston. She's already blown to hell and back."

"Jack, those crates are inside that wreck if you're right. With a little luck, I hope to dive to the depth of the Boston. But I'll tell you right now, there's no way to get them out the side doors you described. You may be good at salvagin' boats just below the water's surface, but I'm good at goin' down into the green dark water and tryin' to work. The frame of that boat will be twisted from the damage. I can tell you now, we won't be able to get them opened sixty feet down. Even if we could, draggin' the crates sideways out the doors would most likely tear 'em up. But that old man has the brains to show us how to blow 'er apart and not destroy what's inside. I've worked with 'im on a sunken boat. He's no fool and will stay calm if the situation gets a little hairy. Just one thing about him though, we got to figure some way to clean 'im up and get rid o' that turtle smell."

Ell had been sitting quietly listening to the two men talk, "I'll take care of that. If you can convince him to come along, I'll take care of the personal hygiene part."

Jeremiah looked at Jack, "Well Jack, I think the lady may have the worst job of all. Hope she can get him to take a bath."

Jack grinned, "First, we got to talk the old man into comin' along to help. He's got the turtle market cornered in Pittsburgh, somethin' a good businessman like him may not wanna give up."

"Jack, you said there's a reward if we can pull this salvage mission off. If that old man can do his explosive magic, this may be possible, and he should be compensated accordingly, agreed? And by the way, we never did talk about my fee for this."

Jack responded, "Agreed. We'll talk about the money later. For now, I'm gonna put you in the small boat and you're gonna go over, find him, and bring him back, since this was your idea."

Ell came over to where the two men were standing, "I'll go with him. In case it takes a female's soft word to help him join our cause." The two men agreed.

As Ell and Jeremiah made their way to the stern section, where the small boat was tied, Jack called down the speaking tube to Billy. "Billy, give me about twenty-five rpm's on the paddles to hold fast our position in the river for a while."

Billy answered, "Okay, but what's goin' on up there, Jack?"

Jack responded, "I'll tell you later. Just give me those rpm's to see if we can hold position for a while." In a couple minutes, Jack saw the small johnboat with its two passengers move toward the mouth of the small creek.

"Can I ask you something, Ma'am?" Jeremiah said quietly.

"Mr. Adams, you can ask whatever you'd like."

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“Well, first, please call me Jeremiah. Second, how did you end up on a boat goin’ after a sunken steamer with ex-confederate soldiers goin’ after the same boat?”

“I guess I didn’t get much outside time in my line of work and Jack needed someone to talk to. Not too complicated. I just needed a change and he needed some conversation.”

Jeremiah never asked what line of work Ell was in, he just looked back over his shoulder as he rowed the small boat toward the creek. But, still, no Catfish could be seen near his boat.

As they approached the old boat, Ell saw two feet propped on the top of the turtle box. “Mr. Jackson, it’s Ell. Are you okay?”

No response from the boat. In a few more seconds the small johnboat floated into the side of the old workboat. “Ah, well, what in tarnation is going on? Who be running into old Catfish’s boat wakin’ him from a needed rest?”

The sound of empty cans being knocked around precluded the old man’s head popping up to see what was going on. “Why, it’s Miss Ell. Ma’am, I never thought I’d lay eyes on you again. And who’s that with you?”

“It’s me, Catfish, Jeremiah Adams.”

“Who?”

“Frogman.”

Catfish rubbed his eyes and squinted as he looked at Jeremiah. “Ah, all right, I can sees ya now. What are you two doin’ in a rowboat in the river wakin’ old Catfish from his afternoon rest?”

Ell started to explain, "Mr. Catfish, we need your help, and Jeremiah says you're the man who can help us with a job downriver."

"How far downriver?"

"Not real sure, maybe seventy or eighty miles from here."

"Seventy or eighty miles? Why, that will take me nigh on a week to travel that far! Besides, why would I wanna go downriver when I got a whole lot o' turtles to sell upriver in Pittsburgh?" He slapped the wooden box full of turtles and dozens of scratching claws could be heard from inside.

Jeremiah answered his question, "Catfish, we'd be tyin' your boat alongside the Mary E and towin' her. If you help us with some explosive work, you'll make enough money you won't have to turtle-hunt for a few years."

Catfish sat up on the box full of turtles and rubbed his face, still showing he'd been sleeping. The box beneath him sounded like it was full of turtles scratching to get out. Catfish slapped his hand on the top of the box. "You'ens be quiet! I be trying to think."

The air moved out of the creek, across Catfish, onto the johnboat with Ell and Jeremiah aboard. The smell of dead fish, turtles, and old Catfish was enough to make a person's eyes water. Ell tried to be diplomatic and not show how bad the smell was, but Jeremiah was not so inclined. "Catfish, you sure some of them turtles haven't gone bad on you? I smell somethin' pretty foul."

Catfish stood up and lifted the lid and looked inside. "Yeah, you're right. Looks like a couple've died. No matter. The others'll

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have 'em gone in a couple o' days. All right, I'll go along, but if I get the chance to sell my turtles for more than them Pittsburgh people will pay, I'm gonna sell 'em and not share the money. I worked hard to catch 'em. Deal?"

Jeremiah and Ell both quickly said, "Deal!"

Catfish pulled the shore line free from a nearby tree root and tied it to the back of the johnboat. It made rowing a whole lot harder for Jeremiah, but once he got the two boats moving back into the river, it wasn't too bad.

Jack had been watching the whole thing from the pilothouse. Didn't know what was said, but knew they were returning with Catfish and his boat. Jack remembered how they both smelled. Jack spoke to himself, "That stinkin' turtle boat is gonna get tied as far back as possible to avoid the smell comin' aboard my boat. As for Catfish and his smell, I hope Ell can hold up her end of the bargain."

The Mary E was holding position in the river's slow current pretty well, but Jack could see a coal barge coming upriver. He'd have to move his boat to the side so the slow-moving coal barge could push by. He telegraphed down 'ALL STOP' on the reverse engine, and then signaled 'SLOW FORWARD.' The boat began to move to the port side and closer to shore, giving the coal barge pilot plenty of time to adjust its course. Jeremiah adjusted his small boat's course as the Mary E moved toward shore, downriver from the two smaller boats coming from shore.

When the barge passed by, Jack telegraphed for Billy to put the boat into reverse and started backing upstream slowly, to close the distance between the boats. At about fifty yards, he signaled 'ALL STOP' and waited for the two smaller boats to come alongside. He leaned out the pilothouse window and called for Brother-in-law. "Go back there and tie that old man's boat off as far back as you can. Make sure it's secure, but far back." Brother-in-law pinched his nose as he went, and Jack laughed.

In a few minutes, the two boats were next to the stern. Billy pulled the small johnboat forward to a midpoint kevel and tied it off. Jeremiah and Brother-in-law secured Catfish's boat to the paddle's support deck on the port side. They used three ropes to make sure it was secure. No chance of it escaping as long as the smell didn't eat through the lines.

Jack heard Brother-in-law call out from below, "Hey Jack, we've got the bottom section cut loose from the stack. You say roll it into the river?"

Jack stepped out on the side deck and looked down at Brother-in-law standing below. "What have you got all over you?"

Brother-in-law looked down at his clothes and then his hands and arms, black as the coal smoke that once passed up the stack. "Damn thing is as dirty on the outside as it is on the inside. I'll wash up after were done."

Jack nodded his head, "Go ahead and roll the bottom section into the river before I start the paddles turnin'." Jack wanted to

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make sure the river drift would carry him away from the unwanted part of the stack just in case the bottom was close. In a few seconds, the black pipe rolled over the edge and quickly disappeared toward the bottom of the river. Jack gauged his position with a tree on the bank and waited until his boat's drift passed the safe point.

While he was waiting, he could hear the voice of Catfish come up the steps. "Well, Captain, Catfish Rob is back and I understand you need my help." Catfish grabbed Jack's hand and shook it. "Proud to be part of your crew, Captain." With that he snapped the best West Point salute he had made in years. Jack's eyes were burning and he was trying not to breathe, but he just couldn't go without air.

From down below on deck, Ell's voice called up to the pilothouse, "Mr. Jackson, could you please come down here?"

Again, Catfish grabbed Jack's hand and shook it, "Thanks, Captain, but I gotta go. That pretty little lady called my name and old Catfish always answers a lady." He gave Jack an ornery wink and out the door and down the steps he went. Jack stuck his head out the window and tried to breathe normally.

"Mr. Jackson, if you're gonna be part of this crew for the next few weeks, you need to look the part. I have a clean set of clothes for you. But before you can put them on, Joshua is preparin' a bathin' tub with warm water from the rain barrel on the back deck. I also have some fine French soap for you to wash up with. All the gentlemen in the big cities use it." She leaned in close, "I keep a few bars just for the men who are my special friends."

“Ma’am, I knows I don’t smells so good. Most o’ the time, it’s just me and my turtles, so it don’t much matter. But for you, I’ll make an exception and take my yearly bath and use your fancy perfumed soap.” Ell put her arm through Catfish’s and walked him to the back deck where Joshua was finishing filling the tub.

Billy and Jeremiah watched as the two headed toward the back, “I’ll tell you one thing—that is one special lady. You would never even know she could smell a thing.” Billy nodded his head in agreement.

It wasn’t long until the two were at the back deck. “Mr. Jackson, your new clothes are over on the handrail. Once you’re in the tub, I’ll take your buckskins and see if I can freshen ’em up a little.”

“Now, Missy, don’t be throwing Old Catfish Rob’s Wild West clothes away. I have an image to keep up, and after we finish this job, I’ll have to go back to playin’ the part.”

“Don’t worry. I would never do that to your prize buckskins. My favorite aunt taught me how to get special work clothes extra-clean. That special cleanin’ formula is a little kerosene, vinegar, pieces o’ crushed-up coal, and water. Let ’em soak for a day or two, and then rinse several times in fresh water. May not get ’em brand-new clean, but sure will kill the smell.”

Without hesitation, old Catfish stripped down to his birthday suit and climbed into the tub. Ell grinned at his snow-white skin hidden under those dirty buckskins. Catfish commenced to washing and

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singing some made-up song about a wild snapping turtle on the Allegheny and a red-headed woman.

Ell interrupted his singing, "Don't forget to wash your hair and behind your ears."

Catfish laughed, "Ma'am, no one's said that to me since my old mother did a long time ago." Again he broke into the snapping turtle song. Ell picked the buckskins up and headed toward the washtub already waiting on the side deck to start the cleaning process.

Jack had let the Mary E drift back into the main channel. He looked up and down the river and saw no traffic coming. He hurried down the steps to take a quick look at the stack sitting on the front deck. "Jeremiah, how much do you think this thing will weigh?"

Jeremiah rocked it back and forth on the two wooden boxes. "Metal's pretty thin; most likely no more'n five hundred pounds."

Jack looked at the stack for a moment before explaining his plan to Jeremiah. "How about helpin' Brother-in-law rig this stack up to the heavy block-and-tackle on the front deck? We'll soon be seein' the old railroad bridge that crosses the river. If my plan works, we'll toss a rope over the bridge's support beam and pull it up with the boat's forward motion. Hopefully, we can use the boat's engines to set it on the top deck over the small stack. I sure hope this works." Jeremiah gave Jack a skeptical look.

But, skeptical or not, Jeremiah indicated he'd do that. "Jack, when we get there, circle the support pier and head the boat north into the current. You'll be able to hold 'er steadier pushin' north.

Current won't affect us as much that way." Jack nodded to let Jeremiah know he understood. He had already planned to do it that way, but it didn't hurt to let the frogman think of something.

For a man who only bathes once a year, old Catfish sure wasn't in a hurry to get out of the tub of pretty smelling water. It must have been on about the thirtieth verse of the turtle song that he figured he was about as clean as he was on the day the good Lord sent him into his world. "Hey boy, did your fingers ever shrivel up like this when you took a bath?" Catfish held up his hands, and his fingers were all wrinkled from the water.

"No sir, can't say my fingers ever got that wrinkly; got some wrinkles, but not like that."

Old Catfish laughed, "Got ya kid! I's almost this winkled before I got in this tub, it just puffed them up a little more." He laughed again.

A little later, Catfish climbed out of the tub and picked up the water bucket with a rope tied to the top, dipped it over the side and pulled the bucket back aboard. He turned the bucket over his head to rinse away the extra soap. Rinsed off three times before he figured that was good enough. He took the towel Ell had left nearby and began to dry himself off. When finished, he picked up the fresh clothes she left him and smelled them. "I'll be danged, that woman must have went and put sweet-smellin' stuff on these-here clothes." Catfish put on the clothes and dried his hair and beard a little more.

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He turned to the boy, "Here, son, give me a hand in turnin' over this tub o' water. Don't want it to eat though the bottom and ruin a perfectly good bathin' tub. Who knows, maybe next year I might get another'n."

Catfish and Joshua made their way to the front deck to join the rest of the crew. "Well look at you," Jack said.

Ell walked over and took her hairbrush and combed the old man's long gray hair. After it was straight, she tied a piece of twine around it to make a ponytail. "There, Mr. Jackson, you look as good as new. The rest of you could take a lesson and take a bath once in a while." The other men just kind of shied away from the comment. That is, except Brother-in-law, who was black from the smokestack he'd just finished working on.

"All right, let's get this boat movin' toward the bridge and set the stack on top." Billy went off to the engine room along with Joshua. Brother-in-law went looking for the bucket with a rope and a bar of soap. Jeremiah started checking his diving equipment, and Jack and Ell went to the pilothouse. Jack moved the telegraph to the 'HALF FORWARD,' and in a couple seconds the paddle started turning, pushing the boat downriver.

Catfish looked around and it seemed to him everyone went off and left him. "Best I go check on my turtles and see if that bottle has a couple more swallers in it." The front deck was empty except for the big yeller dog sleeping in the sun and the black smokestack waiting to be put in place.

It must have been near five o'clock when the railroad bridge appeared just ahead, crossing over the river. Jack blew into the speaking tube, "Billy we're comin' up on the bridge. Ease 'er back to about thirty revolutions on the paddles until I see how we stand in the current. Tell Brother-in-law to get the rest of them on the front deck to help with the stack."

In a few seconds, the front deck was alive with the crew. Jack eased the boat over to the port side and was going to pass inside the left-hand pier, turn her north, and come alongside the right pier. Jack called down onto the deck and Jeremiah appeared on the side. "Get ready. I'll have to keep a steady hand on the wheel. Throw the line over the bridge beam and then loop the rope three times around the forward keel. We'll use the boat's forward motion to lift the stack up, and once it's up, I'll move the boat forward slowly. You'll have to play out the line to keep it high and allow the boat to move north. Once it's up in the air, two of you come up and signal down to Brother-in-law on the rope to let it down when it's in position." Everyone already knew the plan; Jack just wanted to tell them one more time.

Jack passed the left bridge abutment and turned the bow back toward the north into the current. He looked at the pier and gauged his speed. He spoke into the tube, "Billy, just a few more revolutions on the paddle." Jack gauged the current and the boat's speed. It was time. He headed toward an open place in the support rail on the bridge's underside.

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The boat was barely moving forward in the slow current. Brother-in-law coiled the rope real tight in a circle and at the right moment he flung it high over the beam, perfect the first time. Quickly, he wrapped the line around the deck keel. As the boat moved forward, the stack slowly began to rise. It made a dragging sound as it slipped across the deck. Large black pieces of coal dust and burnt creosote fell from inside the stack. Soon it was rising in the warm afternoon air.

Jack kept an eye on the boat's position and forward speed. The stack was now high enough to clear the pilothouse. The boat still moved slowly forward. Brother-in-law watched carefully as the boat moved, and the stack held about the same height as he played out the rope at just the right speed to compensate for the boat's upriver movement. In a few seconds, the stack was hanging over the top of the pilothouse. Jack could no longer see it but knew it was suspended by a single line just above him. He got a little weird feeling about his situation. He had never really thought about the stack being suspended over him at some point.

By now, Jeremiah and Catfish were standing next to the old stack. Jeremiah held his hand over the side so Brother-in-law could see him giving him hand signals indicating to begin lowering the stack. Jack called down to Billy, "If you can, cut two rpm's, now." The stack began coming down toward the deck; it was positioned just about right. Jeremiah indicated down a little quicker to Brother-in-law. The boat was almost steady, and the stack was coming down in the

correct position. In a couple more seconds, the sound of the black metal stack coming to rest on the top deck was heard. They had done it!

"Pull that rope off the bridge and I'll let 'er drift outta here." Jeremiah pulled the rope from the overhead beam, and it fell quickly onto the deck.

The Mary E had a new stack; she'd begun to transform her appearance for her mission. Jack put the wheel hard over and the boat headed downstream. He turned to the men standing behind the wheelhouse next to the stack. "Get some line and tie it down in three places. Most likely it isn't gonna fall, but no sense takin' a chance." Catfish had already brought a coil of rope to secure the stack before Jack had said anything.

It was going to be close to dark by the time they got to Miller's Crossing that evening. Jack remembered the river shallowed up just above the low-water crossing. He reckoned for a minute and wondered if he wanted to try and cross the shallow water place tonight or in the morning. As he approached, the evening light gave him a good reading on the surface ripples in the smooth dark water. *Stay to the port side and it should be easy passage,* Jack thought to himself. He telegraphed down to Billy, 'SLOW AHEAD.' Billy answered back, 'SLOW AHEAD.'

The Mary E went through the narrow channel in the near darkness without any problems. Jack turned her bow toward the starboard and began the slow turn into the shallow river wharf.

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Soon, the sound of the boat's side rubbing against the old wooden wharf meant she was home for the night. The sky's color faded as the last light of day disappeared into the oncoming night. The sound of crickets and a nearby frog welcomed the weary travelers. A thick fog rose from the warm waters into the cool night air surrounding the boat. Night had come to the river, and the Mary E and her crew were finished for the day.

Chapter 16

Return to Miller's Crossing

As the sun rose in the eastern sky, the night fog slowly began to disappear with the coming light. It was going to be a warm day by the sounds of the cicadas already singing in the distant willow trees. Jack rubbed the sleep from his eyes; he knew by the insects' early songs that the sky would be clear and the sun hot by noon. Best be getting up and starting the day.

The smell of coffee and bacon cooking drifted in the morning air. Jack smiled as he thought to himself, *Ell's cookin' breakfast. Somethin' special about that woman, and someday I'm gonna have a talk with her. But not today.* Jack liked sleeping out in the open along the river. When he woke each morning, the smells of river and dampness were usually there. He didn't mind, it reminded him he was alive and doing what he loved.

He also sometimes remembered the morning he woke up in the hospital, days after he'd been shot. The awful smell of dying men, along with the river's smell. The memory still haunts him sometimes. He swore to himself that if he made it back home to the river, he would try to always awaken in the river's arms. Jack had pretty much kept that bargain with himself and the river for all these years.

He heard voices down on the main deck. He rolled to the edge and looked down toward the bow. Ell and Catfish had taken an old

metal tub and built a small fire inside it. A couple metal bars and a metal plate served as the cooking area over the burning wood. It looked like Catfish knew his way around a frying pan.

Jeremiah was sitting near the front of the boat, looking through a small book. Must be important, he had his store-bought reading spectacles on. Jack had always wanted to get himself a pair, but just hadn't had the extra money to buy such a thing. If this job went right, he thought to himself, I'm gonna get me a pair. Heck, I'll get Billy his own pair too. Billy had a pair; well, not a real pair of glasses; he had one lens he carried in his pocket for when he needed to look at something up close. Jack had borrowed it a couple times.

Jack called down to Jeremiah, "What ya readin'?"

"It's a book on some new ways o' workin' underwater. Those fellers up in New York are buildin' bridges across them rivers surroundin' that island. They tell in here how they moved some big stones into place for bottom support. Used canvas bags filled with air to float them into place. Got me to thinkin' about how we can get those crates out of the boat and up close to the surface."

Jack rubbed his head, "Too early for hard thinkin'. What's for breakfast?"

"Bacon an' fried turtle," Catfish called out.

By now, Jack had made his way down onto the deck where the cooking was going on. "Did you say fried turtle?"

"Yes sir, Captain. Did you know a turtle has seven different types of meat inside that hard shell? That's what makes 'em so good

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for soup. Them rich folks knows that. Why else would they want turtle soup and pay good money for it?" Catfish peered up at Jack with a questioning look.

Jeremiah, who'd been sitting quietly during the conversation, looked up over his glasses and said, "Could be they don't know any better; them rich folks can be pretty dumb sometimes."

Ell handed Jack a cup of coffee and offered him a plate with a couple pieces of bacon and turtle meat on it. "Try it Jack, you'll be surprised at the taste."

Jack picked up a piece of the cooked meat and closely examined it. It smelled okay. It was cooked, but he'd smelled that box on Catfish's boat when it was opened and wasn't sure he could bring himself to eat one of those things. Finally, he just closed his eyes and wrinkled his face as he bit into the piece of meat.

"Be careful, Jack, it's hot," Ell cautioned him.

He began to chew, and it wasn't long before he made a face that indicated he enjoyed the meat's flavor. He just didn't want to think about that box of scratching turtles where this came from. "This is pretty good. What're these white things on the side?" Jack pointed, questioning two small white round things on his plate.

Catfish said real quick, "Them's the best part, Captain. Eggs, turtle eggs. Them rich people will pay twice as much for a bowl o' soup with turtle eggs cooked in it. No way I can tell iffin' they have eggs inside of 'em when I catch 'em. Iffin' I could tell, I'd charge 'em

twice as much for them turtles. Ain't fair they make all the money and old Catfish does the hard work."

Jack picked up the egg, looked it over, and popped it into his mouth. "Tastes kinda like a chicken egg."

Catfish had butchered three large turtles that morning and Ell had sliced off half a slab of bacon to cook for the crew of the *Mary E*. "Never thought I'd eat turtle for breakfast, but that was pretty good," Billy said to Catfish. By the time the group of salvagers had finished breakfast, the turtle meat was gone and bellies were full.

It was the first time the group of people were all together as a crew since starting back down the river. Jack knew it was as good a time as any to explain what may lie ahead of them going after the Boston. "Best you all know what could be waitin' for us downriver. Gettin' at the Boston is gonna be near on impossible. That is, even if she's sittin' on the bottom where I think she could be. I'm countin' on my river experience workin' the snag-puller, and I have some idea of bottom currents and river depth t' help us. Even so, the boat may've caught on an underwater shoal or rock snag and be held fast there. If that happened, she'd be exposed above water, and Bourdon and his people would already have found her. Maybe even the insurance people, along with the authorities who are lookin' for the lost cargo, might have gotten to 'er. And remember that Bourdon has some people convinced that the crew of the *Mary E* had a hand in her bein' wrecked so we could pirate the cargo. Most wanna put me in jail, and Bourdon wants me and this crew to disappear along

with the cargo o' that boat. Don't forget he's likely already had several men killed to get what he and his southern friends want."

Brother-in-law dumped his plate of turtle bones into the river alongside the boat before he asked Jack about the plan. "Jack, we all pretty much know about all that. My question is, why the false stack and what're we doing here at Miller's?"

Jack stood up, walked to the front of the boat, and pointed to an old dish boat sitting just north of the crossing. "See that boat? If I can convince Miller t' sell it to us, we'll lash it t' the port side o' the Mary E, and you'll paint a sign on it: 'Dr. Hardgrave's, Dentist', along with a couple pictures o' teeth. I want people to think we're just another medicine boat movin' downriver. We have to stop in Wheelin' for some supplies, and I want to see Mudder again. If we tie up on the main channel side of the river, people in Wheeling will only see that side of the boat. With that big stack with a crown on top and the side boat, it should hide our identity for a while. Should buy us some time."

Jeremiah lit his pipe and looked at Jack, "Tell 'em about the actin' part."

Jack walked over to where Ell was standing listening to his explanation. "If someone comes around looking for the doctor, Ell will wrap a white cloth around her face, covered in somethin' that looks like blood, start cryin' and carryin' on something ferocious to scare off any would-be patients."

Catfish jumped up about then, "Heck, Captain, I've pulled a tooth or two in my life; I reckon a few more won't hurt. Well, that is, they won't hurt me." The small group of people laughed at Catfish's words.

"Well, Catfish, let's hope it don't come to that. Once we get what we need in Wheeling, we'll make our way downriver and try an' find the Boston."

"Jack, I'm a pretty good swimmer, and I can dive deep. C'n I help when we find the Boston?" Joshua asked.

Jack smiled, knelt down beside Joshua, and petted Sunny lying beside him. "We're all gonna have to help to get at the Boston. Jeremiah, you wanna explain what your plans are for gettin' the crates out of the wreck?"

"This is the craziest and most dangerous dive I've ever attempted. Make no doubt, a dive to the depth that Jack thinks the Boston is in may have been done in the ocean with special equipment, but not in the Ohio River. In fact, until Jack told me of the hole in the river bottom where he thinks the Boston is, I never even thought about such a deep dive. I'll be goin' down, and one of you will need to go down on the second dive to help recover the crates. The cargo's most likely still inside the Boston. First thing we gotta do is make it easier to get at it. The side cargo doors won't be of any help. So we have to open the top of the Boston to get inside."

Brother-in-law stood up, "I've been on that boat, and there ain't any top cargo access to the lower deck."

“Ain’t now, but that’s where Catfish comes in.” Jeremiah pulled a piece of chalk out of his pocket and began to draw a crude picture of what he believed the boat might look like from Jack’s description. When he finished, he started to explain. “Brother-in-law says the cargo’s behind this bulkhead wall. Catfish can rig explosives that, if I can place them correctly, will remove the wall and part of the upper decks. Open ’er up like a tin can. Once that happens, the cargo should be easier to access. Sixty feet down will be too far for riggin’ liftin’ cables around wooden crates. Been readin’ in my book about engineers in New York movin’ big stones for bridge foundations with canvas bags. They take the sealed bags and attach them to the stones. Fill the bags with air and float the stones up suspended below the bags. The bags are moved into place, and the air’s slowly removed. Then the stones can be placed with precision. I think we can use the same method to get the crates out o’ the Boston.”

“We ain’t got no air bags,” Billy said with a bit of a scowl on his face.

“We’ll make our own. When we get to Wheeling, we’ll buy some large canvas tarps, some harness thread and heavy needles. We’ll stitch ’em together and seal ’em with tar pitch. Each one will have an air hose so we can fill it from aboard our boat. We’ll float the loads to the surface and use Catfish’s boat to move ’em into shallower water where we can lift them aboard.” Jeremiah tamped his pipe and relit it as he waited for questions.

Jack stood and looked at his friends. "It's gonna take all of us to pull this off. And you all know it's gonna be dangerous. Bourdon and his men are lookin' for the Boston and for us. If you don't want to put your life in danger, I'll understand. I'm a river salvager, that's pretty much all I've known for most o' my life. The Mary E and me have no choice but to try and clear our names. But you all aren't known by them downriver, and there won't be any hard feelin's if you don't wanna go along on this run. When we get t' Wheelin' any, that's of a mind to, can go ashore and put this behind you. I sometimes wonder what I've got myself into, when I go t' thinkin' about it. Don't want any answer now. Just think on it. When we get to Wheelin' if anyone decides to move on, I'll be thankin' you for your time, and if I make any money, you'll get your share."

Everyone sat silent for a few moments; not a word was said. After a while, Jeremiah stood up and cleared his pipe's bowl on his hand before saying, "Looks like Miller's open for business. Best we be seein' if he got an old medicine boat and some explosives for sale."

Catfish stood and half ran back to his small boat. In a couple minutes he came back with a handful of dynamite. "I got near enough back there, but won't hurt to get some more. An' you might see if he's got any o' them new detonators with wires. I seen 'em used to blow trees out o' the dam last summer. Those new detonators give the man handlin' the explosives a lot more control."

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“Catfish, why do you have so much dynamite on your boat?” Jack asked.

Catfish winked and smiled at the crew, “Sometimes them catfish are hard to catch. I have on occasion given ’em some encouragement to come to the surface with a stick or two o’ this stuff. ’Sides, I kinda’ like the smell of a good explosion every now an’ then.”

Jeremiah and the others laughed, “Come on, Jack, let’s see if we can find Catfish his blastin’ caps. Wouldn’t want him goin’ too long without the smell of an explosion.” The two men stepped onto the wharf and headed up the hill toward the old store.

“Jeremiah, I reckon you oughta know I ain’t got no real spendin’ money. I trades for most o’ what I need along the river. If old man Miller wants real money for that boat, we may be in trouble.”

Jeremiah stopped to light his pipe. “Jack, let me handle Miller. I’ve done business with him before, and he owes me. Time I collect on the favor.” The two men made their way up the hill past heavy cargo wagons filled with coal for passing boats.

As Jack walked in, he could smell smoke from one of the cigars he’d traded to Miller the last time he was in the store. The two men saw Miller sitting in the open second floor office looking over the books. The smoke from the cigar hung in the air over his head like a storm cloud. The lack of air movement in the old building gave the smoke an almost solid appearance above the old man’s head, and the morning light reflected off the side window giving the cloud a glowing appearance. The two men walked to the back near the steps.

"Mr. Miller, may we come up?"

"Who's we?" came the quick response.

"Jeremiah Adams and Captain Jack Dulin."

No answer for a few seconds. Then in a gruff deep tone, "I s'pose. COME UP! COME UP! I ain't got all day! I'm a busy man, got things to do, come on, get up here."

Jeremiah and Jack made their way around the boxes piled on the steps up to the second floor office. "Mr. Miller, how are you today?" Jeremiah asked.

"You fellers didn't come up here to find out about my well-bein'. What the hell do ya want? Be quick about it. I'm a busy man." The old man still had his head in the ledger books.

"We come to get some blastin' materials and some ropes and air hoses. You got them things for the mines, don't you?" Jeremiah asked.

"Course I do. Any fool can see them things down on the floor down there. See my clerk; he c'n take care o' you. Don't need me for that, I'm a busy man. Good day gentlemen. See the clerk." He went back to figurin' his ledger-books once again.

"One more thing. I'd like to take that old merchant boat off your hands that's sittin' down on the edge o' the river, just a wastin' away." Jeremiah waited for an answer.

Miller finally stopped what he was doing and looked up at the two men. He looked at Jack, "I know you. You was in here the

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other day with that pretty little woman, weren't ya?" Miller looked down on the store floor to see if Ell was once again in his store.

"Yes sir, I was. I mean, yes sir, I had a lady with me the last time I was in. Traded you some whiskey and cigars for some store items. Looks like you enjoyed 'em." Jack could see two empty bottles on the floor and the spittoon full of old cigar butts.

"What you fellers need with that valuable dish boat? Man owed me money for the storewares he sold outta that boat. Got drunk and lost 'is money in a card game and 'spected me to give 'im a line o' credit. I don't do credit. I took the boat as payment. Been two years now. I might be willin' to part with it for, let's say, one hundred dollars."

Jeremiah leaned down to a chair in front of Miller's desk, removed a box and set it on the floor next to the desk. Next he reached over and picked up one of Millers cigars right off his desk. Broke it in half and used it to fill his pipe and lit it. "Tell you what I'll do, Miller. I'll take that boat, the supplies we need, and ten tons o' coal. Plus you give me fifty dollars, and we'll call it even."

Miller leaned back in 'is chair and laughed out loud until he started to cough uncontrollably for a minute. When he finished, he spat a disgusting chunk of phlegm into the over-flowing spittoon. "Adams, you got spunk. No brains, but spunk. Now you two get the hell outta here. I'm a busy man and books to do. Go on! Git!"

Jeremiah slid a piece of paper and a pencil from the corner of the desk to over in front of Miller. "We'll be on our way just as soon as

you sign this bill of sale for that boat and tell your clerk to fill our order.” He then also held out his hand, “And, yes, there is the matter of my fifty dollars.”

Miller squinted his eyes at Jeremiah, “I don’t know who you think you are, but it’s time you and your friend get the hell outta my store. I told you I got books to do.”

Jeremiah tapped his finger on the paper in front of the old man. “Mr. Miller, do you remember me from last year? I was here doin’ a survey o’ the river bottom for the railroad. Do you remember how they wanted to bring that new bridge across right here where your store is?”

Miller just glared at Adams, who was leaning back in the chair with his feet on the corner of the desk, smoking his pipe. “You know, Miller, that’s some pretty good smokin’ tobacco. You see, I hired this guy and his boat to bring me downriver to re-check my river bottom records. I been thinkin’, perhaps I was wrong and this would be the best place to cross the river with a new bridge.” Adams dropped his feet to the floor with a thud and leaned forward quickly toward Miller. “Well Mr. Miller, what do you think I should do?”

Jack put his hand on Jeremiah’s shoulder, “What’re you doin’?”

“Dulin, you stay outta this. I just hired you to bring me downriver, not to tell me how to do my job.”

Jack looked surprised and stepped back from Jeremiah.

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“Well, Mr. Miller, what are we gonna do?” Jeremiah again placed his shoes on the corner of the desk and resumed smoking his pipe. “Good tobacco. Did I say that before?”

For almost a minute, no one said anything. Miller stared at Jeremiah. Jeremiah put his hands behind his head and leaned even further back in his chair. Jack was surprised at what had just happened.

Finally, Miller slid another piece of paper and pencil in front of Jeremiah. “Adams, you put on paper that your survey found the river bottom at Miller’s crossin’ to be unstable and not suitable for bridge abutments to be set in the soft bottom. You do that and I’ll give you that old boat and the supplies you ask for. But I am not givin’ you fifty dollars.”

“Did I say fifty? Sorry, I meant seventy-five dollars.” Jeremiah went back to smoking his pipe and looking up at the cloud of smoke above his head illuminated by the sun coming through the store’s high windows.

“All right. Fifty dollars and not a penny more,” Miller groaned.

Jeremiah’s shoes returned to the floor. “Done.” He picked up the piece of paper and began to write. He stopped, “Miller, git to writin’ out that bill o’ sale, and call your clerk up here to witness our signatures and I’ll have my hired man witness for me. We want our transaction to be legal and everything. Don’t want folks thinkin’ you took advantage of me.” Jeremiah laughed.

Miller just groaned again as he called down on the floor for the clerk to come up and witness the two men's signatures. When the papers were signed, Jeremiah started to hand his paper to Miller and then pulled it back. "Almost forgot, there's the matter of the fifty dollars."

Miller removed a small cashbox from a side drawer in his desk and counted out fifty dollars in gold coins. He tossed them on the desk. Jeremiah picked one of them up, looked it over, and bit the corner of one of the coins. "Can't be too careful these days. Gold's in short supply, and the government wants silver coins to replace 'em." Satisfied that they were real gold, he exchanged papers with Miller. Jeremiah turned to Jack, "Go on down with the clerk and get the supplies we need, and stay outta the sugar candy; I ain't paying for that this time." Adams turned to Miller who was still glaring at him. "So hard to get good help; they'll take advantage of you every time they get the chance." Jeremiah stuck his hand out to Miller to seal the deal. Miller turned and spat into the overflowing spittoon next to his desk, and went back to his ledger books. Jeremiah tipped his head and said, "Good day, Mr. Miller.

Jeremiah made his way down the steps and onto the main floor. "Don't be foolin' around, Dulin, we've got a boat to pull out into the river. I'm payin' you good money to ferry me around."

The counter clerk leaned over to Dulin, "That guy's a real jerk. How'd you get tied up with him?"

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"I'm askin' myself the same question." Dulin turned and looked at Jeremiah as he went out the door.

"I'll have a couple o' the boys bring the hoses down t' the boat. The detonators are in the far buildin' in the cellar for safety. I'll walk over and we'll get 'em out for you."

Jack turned and looked up at Miller. He raised his hand in a gesture to say good-bye. Miller just moved his head in acknowledgement. The clerk and Jack went off heading toward the cellar house that was covered with dirt to get Catfish's detonators and dynamite.

Before long, Jack had the detonators and dynamite and was heading back down to the boat. The two men delivering the hoses and rope had placed them on the front deck. Jeremiah was standing nearby taking inventory of the other supplies.

Jack came on board and grabbed Jeremiah sharply by the arm. "What the hell was that all about? You blackmail Miller and treat me like a hired hand?"

"Old man Miller offered me two hundred dollars last year when I did the survey for the railroad. Wanted me to lie about the river bottom at his crossin' so the railroad wouldn't build there. When my recommendation was made, I said the bottom conditions were better upriver to build the bridge. I went back for my money and Miller just laughed at me, tellin' me to get outta his store."

"You falsified the report so the railroad wouldn't cross at his place?" Jack asked.

"No, the bottom here is gray shale and sandstone, if they cut into it to build bottom foundations for heavy bridge piers, it would deteriorate over time. The upriver location has good bedrock and is the better location. But, Miller didn't know that, and he cheated me. I owed him, but now we're even."

"But what about me workin' for you and all that stuff?" Jack asked.

"Most likely, I ain't ever gonna need anything from Miller again. But, in your case, you may pass this way again and need supplies goin' upriver. He now figures you were as big a victim here as he was. The truth is, in a couple o' years when the bridge is built, Miller's Crossing won't be needed anymore. The coal company's gonna build a terminal to load coal trains and barges goin' north just upriver a half a mile. His hold on the crossin' and all the money he's swindled outta people will come to an end."

Catfish saw the detonators under Jack's arm and came to get them. "Let me see, are they the good ones?" Catfish pulled one of the long metal detonators outta the box and smelled it. "Ah, that's the good stuff. Got a fresh smell, so it ain't been lyin' around for a while. What about the detonator wire, did you get that too?"

Jeremiah took his foot and moved the wooden box with the wire inside. "Here Catfish, take it and put it somewhere dry until we need it." Catfish pulled a length of wire out of the box and held one end next to his eye and the other at arm's length looking along the wire.

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This is the good stuff. With this, I can open that boat like a can of fresh peaches.”

Jack was standing on the front of the boat looking toward the old boat he'd just acquired. “Hey, Billy, whatta ya think we oughtta do about gettin' her into the river?”

“First, Jack, let's get Catfish's boat loose from the Mary E and take her over and tie her off on the far bank. Then we'll get a couple o' lines on the boat and pull 'er back into the river. She looks to be afloat, but she's up in pretty shallow water and most likely sittin' on the gravel bottom. We can't get this boat in close to the shore—way too shallow.

Jack looked up at the stack, and at first he was surprised to see the bigger stack with a crown on top. He had, for a moment, forgotten about the deception of the new stack. Black smoke was rising from above the stack's crown and he knew the boiler was most likely up to steam. “Brother-in-law, you and Joshua take the rowboat and a couple o' heavy coils o' line and make your way up t' that boat and tie off to anything strong on the boat. Then row out t' where we can secure 'er and pull 'er into deeper water. We have t' take Catfish's boat across the river first and get it outta the way before we go tryin' t' pull that boat. Don't want anything holdin' us back.”

Brother-in-law went off to get started. In a few minutes the small boat with the two on board was making its way toward the old boat. Jack made his way to the pilothouse and made ready to cast off. “Catfish, untie us from the wharf.”

By now the Mary E was drifting back out into the river and Jack could begin to turn her stern out into the narrow channel. It didn't take long to cross the river and tie off Catfish's boat to the far side. Once she was secure Jack began moving his boat upriver to a spot above the old boat. Brother-in-law and Joshua tied the tow lines to her deck cleats and soon, the small boat with the two men was out in the main channel, alongside the Mary E.

"Jeremiah, take hold o' them lines to that boat. Tie 'em off to the starboard kevel." Jack wished he still had a port kevel but knew it was on the bottom with parts of the Boston's wreck.

Jack called down to the people on the deck, "Stand clear when I take taut the lines; if one breaks it'll do harm if it hits you."

Jack looked up and down the river to make sure it was clear to maneuver his boat with a line running to the stationary boat. When he was sure, he telegraphed down to Billy, 'SLOW BACK.' In a few seconds, the paddles began pushing water toward the front of the boat and the lines to the old boat soon became taut. It was like a tug-of-war for a few minutes; neither gave an inch.

Jack blew into the speaking tube, "Billy, give me a little more steam." He could quickly feel the extra power to his boat paddles. Near shore, the stubborn boat still didn't move from its resting place. Jack's boat began to shake from the force of the paddles against the water and no movement of his boat. Then without warning the old boat came free from its longtime resting place and slid back into

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deeper water. The Mary E quickly moved backwards, pulling its new load. Jack signaled down to the engine room, 'BACK SLOW.'

With the boat slowly moving back upriver and the wooden boat secured on two long lines, the river's current began pushing it downriver into the main channel. Jack knew the current would bring it downriver below his boat. In a few minutes, the old medicine boat was sitting mid-river waiting for Jack to secure it alongside the Mary E.

Jack telegraphed down to Billy, 'SLOW AHEAD.' He wanted the boat at the end of the ropes to pass over the shallow river crossing and then he would follow close behind. As they passed the crossing, Jack looked toward Miller's store high on the bank. He could see Miller standing at the upper window, looking at him. The old man raised his hand to Jack as a gesture of good-bye. He seemed to know this may be their last meeting and bore Jack no ill feelings. Jack looked at the river for a moment and then back to where Miller had been standing, but he was no longer in the window.

Jack signaled down to Billy, 'MORE STEAM.' He wanted to overtake the floating boat and secure it to his side. It wasn't long before they maneuvered alongside the old medicine boat, and she was soon lashed tight to the port side of the Mary E. Only one more thing to do, ease into shore and retrieve Catfish's waiting turtle boat. They soon had the small boat on the outside of the wooden dish boat. That should be far enough that the smell might not come

aboard. Jack wanted to check all the lines to make sure the extra drag on the boat was secured.

Brother-in-law stood looking at the side of the old boat now next to the Mary E. He called to Jack, who was making a final check before returning to the pilothouse. "Hey Jack, whatta ya want me to do?"

"Ell will help you. She found some paint in the back cabin. Whitewash the boat. Make 'er look good. Then on this side, paint in big letters, 'Dr. Hardgrave's, Dentist.' If ya can, paint a couple o' teeth on both sides o' the name. When you're done, we'll turn 'er around and face the painted side o' the boat toward the east shore. When we go into Wheeling with that boat blockin' the side view o' the Mary E and her new crown on the top stack, we ain't likely to attract much attention. At least not for a while, but we still don't wanna spend much time in the city. You can go see your wife, but be smart an' go the back alleys in case your house is being watched."

It wasn't long until the whitewash job began. Ell and Joshua helped Brother-in-law with the job. By afternoon, the old boat's exterior looked almost new. Brother-in-law's lettering did him proud; most likely he could've been a sign painter if he took a notion to.

The day was growing late, and Jack wanted to turn the lettered side of the boat toward shore before dark. Brother-in-law and Jeremiah loosened the lines and let the floating dentist's office drift free. Jack moved the boat around and secured the other boat with the letters to the outside of the two boats. "Make sure Catfish's boat

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is secured on the far side. Helps make our deception better with an old workboat tied to us and keeps the smell farther away.”

It was near dark when Jack first saw the lights of the suspension bridge crossing the Ohio. He signaled down to Billy, ‘SLOW AHEAD.’ He knew just below the bridge he could bring the boat up against the shore keeping his port side to those who could see that side of the boat from Wheeling. He knew the water was deep enough there, and the paddles wouldn’t be in danger of dragging in the mud.

As he eased past the bridge, he angled the boat in toward shore and signaled down to the engine room, ‘ALL STOP.’ The Mary E drifted forward, and at the last second, he turned the rudders to swing the stern into shore. He felt the boat rock gently as she came to rest for the night. Down below, Billy banked the fire in the boiler and secured the engine room for the night. He opened the steam vent just enough to bleed off the boiler’s pressure, but not enough to draw attention to the sound.

On deck Brother-in-law and Joshua had already pulled the lines ashore and were making fast the Mary E to the island. Brother-in-law was anticipating getting home for a meal cooked by his wife. Joshua asked Jack, “Can I go with Delmar to his house for the night? I’d kinda like to see Sarah.”

“Good idea. I ’spect you to keep him outta trouble and stay t’ the back streets and alleys. Don’t want people to know he’s back in town.” Jack turned to Brother-in-law, “You be back by afternoon

tomorrow. I gotta go see Mudder and stop by and see that banker feller. Need t' find out if anything's been goin' on, and maybe find out somethin' about Bourdon's whereabouts. You be careful, don't want no harm to come to you or the boy, you hear me?"

Brother-in-law indicated that he did. With that, he and Joshua, along with the big yellor dog, jumped down onto the sandy riverbank and headed up over the hillside. They were soon out of sight.

Jack looked at Ell and the rest of his crew, "Ell, if I remember right, you said you were gonna bake a blackberry pie. How about we fix some supper, have a piece of pie, and then we'll pay Tilley a late night call?" Ell agreed, and Jack went off with her to fix some supper.

Billy looked at Jeremiah as the two went off toward the makeshift kitchen area, "Someday those two are gonna have to talk," Billy said.

"Yeah, but ain't likely gonna be today," Jeremiah responded.

Chapter 17

Mudder's Warning

It was near ten o'clock by the time the crew of the Mary E had finished supper and cleaned up. Billy, Catfish, and Jeremiah were sitting on the front deck smoking cigars and trading river stories. Catfish entertained the other two with wild stories of giant catfish and wild women. Jeremiah and Billy mostly listened and laughed.

Jack and Ell came down from the pilothouse and joined the trio for a few laughs. "I'd love to stay and trade stories, but Ell and me are gonna slip down to Tilley's and find out what she may've heard since we've been gone upriver. Billy, keep that fire in the box banked and burnin'. We might want to get started quickly tomorrow. Takes too long to start a totally cold boiler."

"Don't worry, Jack, I've already got a good bed o' coals just waitin' to be set ablaze. Water in the boiler should stay just below boilin' point. Catfish and I'll take care o' your boat. Don't you two go gettin' yourselves in trouble. Don't forget there's a reward out on you and this boat. Best you don't let anyone collect on it." The men went back to talking about the giant catfish Jeremiah had seen, near-as-big as a man, below the Davis Dam.

Jack helped Ell down from the side of the boat onto the sandy shore. Jack walked just north so he could look over and see the Wheeling wharf area. Must've been seven steamers tied up for the

night. Just south of the wharf area, the steamer Franklin was coming in from the Muskingum City run, most likely bringing farm produce picked that day. It would be unloaded tonight and head back downriver in the morning for another load. Field-grown vegetables would be for sale in the town's two markets come the morning. Jack didn't see any of the big salvage boats he'd seen a week or so ago going downriver.

Jack helped Ell up over the steep bank and onto the dimly lit street. No one was around as they made their way to the south end of the island and Tilley's boarding house. It took almost twenty minutes for them to travel the distance to the end of the island on the far side. They stopped once when Jack thought he saw a policeman on his nightly rounds a couple streets back. But whoever it was paid them no nevermind.

Tilley's place was lit up as usual. As the pair opened the squeaky metal gate, the front room curtain moved and someone inside knew they were now coming up the steps. "Well, you two are a sight for sore eyes. Wasn't sure I'd ever see you'ens again. Them long river cruises can get romantic. Or, you could've got your asses throwed in jail. Either way, I figured it may be a while until I seen you all again. But, glory be, you made it back safe and sound. Now, Jack, you're gonna have to turn around and get your ass outta here. Bourdon's lookin' to squeeze some answers outta you, and the sheriff comes here twice a day askin' about you and your crew. You sure stirred up a hornet's nest. Some says you have them nail machines and are

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gonna sell them and the paperwork to the highest bidder. Bourdon says he's gonna make you a deal you can't refuse."

Tilley stepped closer, "Jack, he came here two days ago. Told me if I seen ya to tell ya that he'd pay twenty-five thousand cash for them crates. Said you'd know what he meant. Or he'd find you and burn you and your boat to the waterline. Makes him no nevermind, just wants his property back."

Jack smiled at Tilley, "Just as sweet as ever." He grabbed her and gave her a big hug.

Tilley turned to Ell and took both her hands into hers, "Girl, it's good to see you. Place ain't been the same since you were gone. Anything you wanna tell me?"

"I missed you and the girls, too. But I needed a change, and thanks to Jack and his friends, I've had quite an adventure." About then, several of the ladies of the house discovered that Ell was back and came giggling and laughing, and led her off to the kitchen.

"Jack, let's go into the parlor and let the girls have their fun. We gotta talk." Tilley turned down the front room lights and closed the door. "Time we be closing tonight anyhow. Been kinda slow lately. Come on, Jack."

The two stepped into the parlor and Tilley closed the curtains and turned down the lamp next to the window. "Jack, Mudder sent word he wanted to talk with you if you showed your face again. Said don't chance comin' through town. Go cross the island into Bridgeport and down to Bellaire. Cross the river and take the trolley

north. Bourdon and the authorities won't think you'll come that way into town."

"Did he say what he wanted?"

"No, just that he wanted to talk, something about the OSL. Does that mean anything to you?"

Jack stood up and walked to where he could look into the kitchen and see Ell with the girls. "She's something special, Tilley. I find myself thinkin' about her more than I should." Jack turned and walked back to where Tilley was sitting and sat down across from her. He took her hands in his. "Tilley, I don't want anything to happen to that lady. I'd never forgive myself. Do you understand?" Tilley nodded. She did.

"I got t' go see Mudder. Should be there early in the mornin'. If I start now, less likely anyone will see me. I'll tell Ell where I'm goin' and she can spend the night here. Tomorrow, I'll work my way back to my boat and head downriver. She'll be safe here. You tell 'er after I'm gone tomorrow. It's for the best. Bourdon and his men'll kill us all if they get the chance. The OSL'll kill us just for fun. Me and the boys, I'm guessing, know what's coming, but Ell most likely doesn't. She's safe here."

Tilley patted his hands. "Jack Dulin, you're as decent a man as I've ever met. I don't know what you've got yourself into, but I pray the good Lord will protect you and your men." She leaned over and gave him a big hug.

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“Best I be goin’. In the mornin’, can you let my men know where I went? The boat’s tied just below the bridge on the island side,” Jack asked.

“Jack, they’ll see your boat first thing in the mornin’. Best you be at least movin’ your boat behind the island.”

“If anybody sees anything in the mornin’, it’ll be a new whitewashed medicine boat for ‘Dr. Hardgrave’s, Dentist.’ Brother-in-law painted a nice sign on the side of an old boat we picked up along the river.” Tilley just shook her head as the two went toward the kitchen.

Ell stood up when she saw Jack coming. “Are we ready to go Jack?”

“Not yet; I gotta make my way down through Bellaire and cross over to see Mudder. Won’t be back until tomorrow night most likely. That way I won’t get caught. You can stay here with Tilley and the girls an’ I’ll come an’ get you. Too dangerous to be seen durin’ the day with me or the boat.”

Jack’s words caught Ell off guard. She hadn’t anticipated that answer, but she only slightly hesitated before saying, “That sounds good. I’ll wait here and that way you won’t have to worry about me. You go on ahead and see Mudder. I’ll be here waitin’ for you to come back.”

They both felt a hurt inside they’d never felt before. But they dared not show it to each other or the girls. Ell quickly went over to Jack and gave him a hug. “You be careful, an’ I’ll see you when you

return tomorrow.” They stared into each other’s eyes, leaving words unsaid.

“All right, Jack, get your butt goin’. Trolleys start to run at seven in the mornin’. You should be there to catch the first car north. Got any money?” Jack pulled his pockets open and showed they were empty. Tilley looked at him, “I should’ve known. If I remember, you always did show a little light on the money side.” Tilley gave him a pocketful of coins. “Trolley’ll take those tokens too.”

Jack turned and walked toward the door, and as he opened it, he paused for a moment and looked in the reflection of the door’s glass. He could see Ell behind him, and she was crying. He wasn’t going to add to her pain with their eyes meeting as he went out the door. He continued through and pulled it closed behind him.

It was near midnight by now, and Jack made his way north to the bridge that crossed into Ohio. The only people he saw were men collecting garbage with a horse-drawn wagon. The night fog was coming up off the river and closing in around Jack as he made his way south along the river road. He couldn’t remember for sure, but figured it must be about three miles to where he could get a ferry across the river. Most likely, it would be near morning before he could get a ride anyway. He began his long walk south.

He’d walked for a good while when in the distance he heard the sound of the town clock chime four times. It was the only sound in the heavy night air. He was alone with his thoughts. He tried to think about what Mudder might say and what the banker may know

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by now. He tried to think about the Boston. Would she be where he believed she would be? No matter how hard he tried to think of other things, his mind went back to seeing Ell's reflection as he left. It left a pain he'd never felt before in his life. It was in some ways worse than Bourdon's bullet had hurt him long ago.

The brick streets were wet from the night mist and fog. Jack still wasn't sure where the ferry crossing was, but he knew the street along the river would lead to where wagons traveled down to the river and ferry. The fog tended to muffle sounds but he could still hear the sounds of horse's hooves moving slowly on the red brick street. He knew the horses must be close, but in the darkness and heavy fog they were hidden from view.

From the cross street and through the mist, he saw a wagon loaded with small wooden kegs going toward the river. The teamster driving the wagon wore a large round-brimmed hat that shadowed his face from the muted light of the street lamps. His overalls had been neatly patched in several places—repairs most likely sewn by his wife. What had once been a dark brown jacket was now faded from the sun and many washings. The teamster stared straight ahead as his horse plodded along the red brick street. The wagon rocked to the side when the big wheels crossed the trolley tracks. Jack raised his hand in greeting to the stone-faced driver, "Good mornin', is this where the ferry crosses?"

The man in the wagon leaned back and pulled the reins to his horses. "Whoa." He sat back in his seat and looked down at Jack.

He said nothing for a moment and then removed the smoking pipe he held fast in his teeth, "Yep, won't run till daylight and they can sees up and down the river. Few years back, a steamer runned over a ferry crossin' in heavy fog, drownin' four men and eight good horses. Since then they waits till they can see a piece up and down the river. "Where you goin, Mister?" The man's accent gave Jack the impression that although he probably wasn't directly from the old country, he most likely grew up in a home with parents who were, and he mimicked their speech pattern.

"Headed up to Wheeling, near the incline in the south end," Jack said.

"Well, you might as well climb up and ride with me. I'm takin' a load o' nail kegs t' the mill in the south end. You can keep me company. I usually only talks to my horses, but they don't answer. Just farts and shits along the way. Not much of a conversation some days." The man, whose face was dark under his large brimmed hat, slid over to the left on the wagon's seat. "Climb on up, saves yourself the ferry cost. They just charges one fee for wagons, horses, and men. Don't cost me nothing extra for you to come along." Jack climbed up into the tall wagon with the man who returned the worn pipe to his teeth.

By the time the morning came and the fog had cleared, Jack was surprised at the number of wagons waiting to be ferried to the far side. There must have been ten wagons loaded with small wooden barrels waiting to cross. The smell of fresh oak filled the air, along

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with the odor of horses. "Is it always like this with wagons full of new nail kegs in the mornin'?"

"Yep, there're nail mills in most o' the towns in the area. The factory that makes the kegs runs twenty-four hours a day to keep up with the demand. The lumber for the kegs comes from fifty miles to the west o' here. Railroad took all the timber around here on the hillsides for their track beds. Folks can't even get a good load o' wood for fires to make soap or render lard these days. Can't use that damn black coal, it'd ruin the makin's. Yep, railroad strips every tree it gets its hands on." The man began moving his wagon down onto the ferry and waited to cross. Three more teams of heavy wagons and horses followed them aboard the ferry.

About half-way across, the wagon's driver removed his pipe and asked Jack, "What're you doin' goin' t' that part o' town, Mister? You don't look like no factory worker. Your hands are hard from workin' with steel and burned from the hot iron. But you don't show the blackness that penetrates a man's skin and can't be removed from workin' them shop floors ten, twelve hours a day. Nope, you don't work in any of them dirty, hot places."

"I been workin' on a packet boat outta Muskingum City, an' I have a friend that I've not seen for a while in south Wheelin'. Just thought I'd stop by and say howdy since I was in town for the day."

The man turned his head slightly and looked out of the corner of his eye at Jack. "Uh-huh." Jack knew he didn't believe his story.

Wasn't long before the ferry touched the West Virginia side of the river. The big chestnut-colored horses strained to pull the wagon and its load up the steep muddy road from the ferry landing. The horses passed gas the whole climb to the top of the embankment. Jack remembered that Catfish smelled worse when he first met him.

The team of horses seemed to need no driver, like they'd traveled this road so many times they knew where they were taking their load. Conversation between the two men was partly about the weather, but the teamster also had a good knowledge of the world around him, which surprised Jack. He spoke of President Cleveland's involvement in the Pullum Strike. He believed, "The president had no business telling hard-working folks they couldn't hold onto the wages they was promised. After all, not one of them businessmen or even Cleveland himself had ever made a living with their hands, as I see it. Them damn people in government want to tell the workin' man what he needs to do or say. Most likely, they got their hands in the pockets of them businessmen who they're supposedly helpin'."

Jack just shook his head and listened as the stern-faced man chewed on his pipe and talked of politics for a ways. The morning sun now filled both sides of the valley; must have been nearly nine o'clock when they reached the part of town Jack was headed to. Jack pointed to a place along the street where the teamster could let him off. The man pulled on the right rein of the two horses, directing them to the edge of the street. He didn't want to hold up the three

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wagons that followed him. Time is money when moving loads of cargo.

Jack looked at the unemotional man in the large hat, "Thank you, Mr....?" The two men had traveled all this way and never exchanged names. The stern teamster removed his pipe from his mouth and looked Jack in the face for the first time, "Joseph Pitellie."

Jack stuck out his hand to the man, "Jack Dulin."

The man's hands were hard and strong. He had the strength of a man whose hands were always in use. "Mr. Dulin, be careful, your friend lives in a very bad part of town. Wouldn't want a river man from Muskingum City to come to harm." For the first time the man smiled. Jack climbed down and looked back up at the teamster, who tipped his hat and placed his pipe back between his teeth. He snapped the reins off the horse's rumps, and they went along down the street with the load of oak kegs. Jack thought to himself about the man and his team. Day after day, traveling the same road. He was thankful he traveled the river with its ever-changing landscape.

Jack started down the first alley he came to, getting off the main avenue. He crossed a few streets and then down one more alley. The back streets smelled of urine and worse. After a while, he came to the building where Mudder was, just across the street from him. Jack stood back in the shadow of the alley, looked up and down the street, and made sure it was clear.

Across the street the door to the establishment opened and a man came out and toward Jack. In a few seconds he stood in front of Jack. "Mudder's waiting."

Jack was surprised that the man knew who he was and that he was there. "How did you know I was here?" The stone-faced man never answered. He turned and retreated across the street. Jack took a deep breath and followed.

As he opened the door to the establishment, it was as if nothing had changed since his last visit. He was sure the same men sat at the bar in the same places. The light that filtered into the room illuminated the blue smoke that hung in the air from the open door. Sitting in the back at the same table, partly hidden in the shadow, was Mudder. The man who summoned Jack returned to the bar and no one took notice of him coming in. It was a dark hard place where men survived by instinct. And whatever they did was done with a purpose. No one who lived in this world seemed to smile.

Mudder waved his left hand, summoning Jack back to his world. Jack moved toward the dark smoke-filled corner. "Sit down, Jack Dulin, and pour yourself a drink." Jack sat down and did as Mudder suggested. "Some said you'd head downriver and was gonna wait till this all blew over. I knew you was a man who went after what he wanted, Dulin."

"Mudder, how'd you know I was back in town?" Jack questioned.

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“Watched for Delmar to return home to that wife o’ his. Knew you’d tell him to go in the back way. Same thing I would’ve told him. When I got word he was back, I knew you’d be along soon.”

“He’s okay, ain’t he?”

“Yeah! Bourdon’s not interested in him; it’s you he wants. He’s so arrogant he figures he don’t have need for spies. He just buys the information from corrupt cops or prominent people in the community. He makes deals people can’t walk away from. If you don’t, your next deal he makes you is the kind they carry you away from. That’s the kind o’ deal he wants to make you.”

“Tilley says you wanted t’ see me?”

Mudder sat back, and his face was in the light. “Bourdon’s been lookin’ for the Boston. Draggin’ the bottom near the big sandbar and bringin’ up plenty o’ debris, but still no crates o’ nail machines. He’s drug the bottom downriver in the main channel as far as one mile. He figured it had to be in the main channel to be below the surface. Not sure how he figures a thirty-foot-tall boat can disappear in twenty feet o’ water. But, then again, he never was very smart. He believes you salvaged the crates and blew up the rest o’ the boat to hide your robbery. Figures you got t’ the wreck and removed those crates before he got there. Took the machines and destroyed the Boston as evidence. Now he’s lookin’ for you.” Mudder leaned close to Jack. “He’s on a gunboat, searchin’ for you now. She’s a heavily hardened steamer called the Southern Sky. She’s one hundred and eighty feet long and displaces about two hundred and twenty

tons. Her two paddles are on 'er sides back near the stern. Engine room and pilothouse have three-quarter inch metal plating. And Jack, she has a thirty foot front nose used as a ram. She's built with every defense a military steamer could have. They mean to have what they believe is theirs, and Bourdon wants you and the Mary E to be a fadin' memory on the river's bottom. He figures you made him look bad to his friends in the Order of Southern Liberty. He called for the gunboat to be brought upriver from the Mississippi so he could use her to deal with you in no uncertain terms."

Jack looked at Mudder, "He's crazy, I didn't have anything to do with the Boston goin' onto that sandbar. His people bumbled that. I came along to do a straight-up salvage of a wreck. No conspiracy or piracy, just a straight salvage job. Now I've involved others and myself with this crazy leftover confederate idealist." Jack, for the first time, was unsure of his next course of action.

Mudder pushed his glass closer to Jack's hand, "Drink up, for tomorrow you may die." Jack picked up the glass and drank it down quick and set it back on the table with a thud. Mudder poured him another.

"Dulin, you've gotta find the crates and make Bourdon lose face with his southern handlers. He messed this up big-time and brought too much attention to the organization. They're not happy. But if he c'n get those machines and make you disappear, he'll save face. He knows that, and that's why he brought in the gunboat. He also has a

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small elite military force on board his steamer. He's left nothing to chance."

Jack thought for a moment, looking at the top of the table. "Does he know what I'm up to with the diver and recovering the crates?"

"From my information, he doesn't know anything about that. He's convinced you got those crates off before you blew 'er up t' cover your tracks. He found pieces of boilers, smoke stacks, cable and rigging, but no crates. Downriver, pieces of the boat have washed up on shore. As far as he's concerned, you have them and he means to have them and your ass."

"How do you know all this?" Jack asked.

"Remember, he has cops and businessmen on his payroll. One good quality about bad cops and businessmen, they're willin' to sell information to both sides. One more thing, Bourdon's had a woman with him for the last several years. Last weekend, she was found beat up real bad, lyin' in front of the North Wheelin' hospital. Didn't think she was gonna live. A priest was called in t' hear her confession. She also told him about Bourdon's plans and his ties to the OSL. The priest is an old friend, couldn't tell me about the confession. But the information about Bourdon? He figured most likely the good Lord would be okay with him tellin' me. The girl died yesterday mornin'." Mudder poured himself another drink.

The two men sat quietly for several minutes, pondering the information they'd exchanged. "Dulin, I don't know what deal you

made with the banker and insurance company, but it better be a good one. The deck's stacked against you, and your hole card is bad. If you were smart, you'd slip downriver at night and disappear for a while. Maybe a few years."

Jack slid his glass back and forth between his two hands as he thought about the situation. He finally looked at Mudder, "Does the Southern Sky have any weakness? Is she fast, and does she have any maneuverability on this narrow river? The Ohio is narrower than the Mississippi; I may need that advantage."

Mudder poured himself a glass and downed it. "From my information, for a big boat, she can move through the water fast. But the heavy steel platin' makes her ride low in the water. She draws about six feet of water. If they try an' turn too quickly, they can take on water. But if she can't chase you down and ram you, she has some heavy armaments. It's said that she has two of the artillery guns from the Val Verde Battery mounted inside the front of the boat. You remember those stories of fancy brass cannons, don't you, Dulin?"

Jack shook his head. He didn't know the stories.

"Early in the war, the confederates captured four special guns at the battle of Val Verde in the New Mexico territories. After the war, the confederates figured the federal government would want the guns back, but sometime in late '64 or early '65, the guns disappeared, so folks reckoned the Texas confederates buried 'em. That was the last heard of 'em until the OSL gunboat showed up on the river. Those

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who've seen the shiny brass barrels at the two front gun ports figure they have to be those that went missin' after the war. They were made to be reloaded fast and to be accurate. Don't let 'em get your boat in their sights. There are two brass guns in front and two smooth-bore guns on each side o' the boat."

Jack thought for a moment about the maneuverability of the Mary E. She had a good chance to out-maneuver them in a fight, but she had no defenses at all. He was going to war with nothing but his wits. "How did a gunboat go unnoticed on the river?" Jack asked.

"Bourdon's southern associates kept it on the big river south of Memphis. Used it to move high-level OSL members around the Mississippi. Those in the organization figure the world is out to get them. They see conspiracy everywhere, so they use fortified carriages and rail cars to protect against gunfire and small explosions when they travel. For them, the war isn't over and they figure someone out there is after them. They're all paranoid."

Jack thought about Mudder's words for a few seconds. "Anything else, Mudder? I gotta get back t' my boat and crew."

"Yeah, he offered me twenty-five thousand dollars to kill you and recover his machines. I turned 'im down. I have more money than I can spend in my empire. What more could a man want?" Mudder lifted his one good arm as if to show Jack all that he owned in the dark, smoky room. "Jack, whatever you do, do it soon. Bourdon'll come back to town and pay a call to Delmar's home and most likely to me. Kill the son-of-a-bitch if you choose to fight."

Jack stood up and finished his drink, "I'm gonna find the Boston and try to recover those machines. Mudder, I owe you once again. Anything I can do for you?"

Mudder leaned forward and brought his good hand down on the table hard, "Win!"

Jack smiled, turned toward the door, and started to walk away. Mudder called to him. "Dulin, I'll put the word out you've been seen upriver and you were tryin' to get word to the nail company for a finder's fee. It won't take long for the word to get downriver to Bourdon. He'll come north lookin' for you; that might buy you some time, but Bourdon's no fool. He'll come after you." Jack raised his hand to Mudder, and he raised his back. Jack walked back out into the daylight.

It took him a few moments to let his eyes adjust to the bright light of day. He guessed it must be near one o'clock by the sun. If Mudder was right, Bourdon was looking on the river for him. Jack needed to make good time and get to Brother-in-law and Sarah's house quickly. Still not taking any chances, he cut through shadowed alleys until he reached the trolley turnaround. The car had just left to return uptown. Jack ran to catch hold and get aboard. Just as he jumped aboard, the conductor saw him. "Mister, that's not allowed; you could've been hurt, and I would've been responsible for that. Please put the toll in the slot." The operator made his point and returned to his job. He was as mechanical as the first conductor Jack had met awhile back.

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There was a day-old paper lying on the seat. Jack picked it up and pretended to read while hiding his face. No sense taking any chances at this point. The car bumped along until it started to cross Big Wheeling Creek. Jack jumped off without the conductor seeing him. No sense in taking a second ass-chewing today. Besides, he could come in from the east to Sarah's house that way.

By the time he made his way around and down the back street into the backyard, it must have been going on two o'clock. Jack was about to knock on the door when the big yellor dog started barking. Brother-in-law appeared in a minute. "Come on in, Jack. We been wonderin' what was goin' on."

Sarah was doing the dishes, and Joshua and Brother-in-law were having a piece of pie. "Jack, would you like a piece o' pie an' a cup o' coffee?"

"No thanks, Sarah, I need to talk with your husband and Joshua. We're gonna be goin' up against Bourdon, and he has a gunboat supportin' 'im now. We can't outrun 'im and we can't outfight 'im. The only thing we have in our favor is he's not lookin' for a medicine boat yet. Won't take 'im long to figure out he's been misled goin' upriver to look for us. This is dangerous and Bourdon's more than willin' to kill to get what he wants. If a man is riskin' his life, I want 'im to know so he c'n make his own choice. I'll think no less of you if you choose to stay here with Sarah."

Brother-in-law picked up his coffee cup and looked at his wife, who had stopped washing dishes and was looking at the three sitting

at the table. "I knows I ain't been much of a husband at times. But I got Jack and Billy into this. I'd not be much of a man if I didn't help them finish it. Whatta you think, Sarah?"

Sarah dried her hands on her towel and walked over to where he sat, "Delmar, I have never had any regrets about marryin' you. You never hurt me, and we've always had a roof over our heads. I wish you'd find the Lord in your heart someday, but that's for you to decide. Go with Jack and Billy, and I'm countin' on you to bring them all back safe." She hugged her one-eared husband and wiped away tears.

Jack turned his attention to Joshua, "Let's go out on the porch for a few minutes. I have a hankerin' to sit in a porch swing for a while, give these two a few minutes to themselves." They made their way to the front porch and sat down in the swing. The chains that held it to the ceiling squeaked as they slowly moved back and forth.

"Joshua, last trip out I gave you the choice to come along or stay. Before I do that this time, I want you to know it's most likely gonna be dangerous. We have to find the Boston's wreck and then try an' bring the cargo to the surface. You would be a big help in operatin' the air pumps. But if we do find it, there are men who want the cargo we find. They're willin' to do us harm to take it, an' that includes you if you come along. I wasn't much older 'n you when I made the decision to go off to war. Well, this is kind of like that for you. You c'n stay here with Sarah until we come back, or you c'n

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come along. You're old enough to understand this is gonna be dangerous, and it's your choice."

Joshua rubbed his dog's head. "Sunny could get hurt if she went, couldn't she?"

Jack looked down at the big yeller dog, "Yes, son, she could."

Joshua didn't say anything for a few moments, "Do you think she could stay here with Sarah until I come back for 'er?"

"I reckon she could, if that's what you want." About then, Delmar and Sarah came out to the porch.

"Sarah, would you mind takin' care o' this young man's dog while we go do some river work?"

Sarah looked at Delmar and then knelt down beside the dog, looking the boy straight in the face. "Me and Sunny will be fine. We'll take walks down by the river every evenin' until you return."

Joshua put his arms around the dog's neck as Sarah petted it on its head. Jack stood up, "Time to go; we have to stop by the banker's room and talk with him before we return to the Mary E."

Sarah kissed Delmar and then kissed the boy on the top of his head. She held the dog as the three made their way toward the steps and headed downtown. "Jack Dulin, you take care o' my men and bring them back safe." She waved and wiped a tear from her eye as she pulled the big yeller dog inside the house.

"Brother-in-law, you got a fine woman there," Jack said.

Joshua looked up at Jack, "Why do you call Delmar 'Brother-in-law?'"

"Well, I guess that's what Billy always called him and so that's what I called him. Never much thought about it, just what I've always known him as. Wouldn't seem right after all these years to call him something else," Jack said.

Delmar looked at Joshua and just smiled, "I never gave it much thought either."

The three made their way downtown to the Front Street Hotel, room 233, river side. Jack knocked on the door. "Just a minute," the voice from inside said. In a short time, the door opened and D.B. Cecil was closing the last button on his jacket. "Come in, gentlemen, please come in."

They entered the room and Jack went immediately to the window and looked across the river to where the boat would be. Sure enough, there she was, with her big black letters printed on the side of the whitewashed boat, 'Dr. Hardgrave's, Dentist.' It looked quiet around the boat. He could see a small stream of black smoke rising from the big crowned stack. If he didn't know better, he wouldn't even recognize his own boat.

D.B. Cecil asked Jack, "What are you lookin' for, and where's your boat? I been lookin' for you to return downriver, but haven't seen your boat yet."

Jack turned and looked at him, "It's north of here, up on the far side o' the river. Got to go back upriver a piece to get more cable for the hoist before we go after the Boston. Don't want to draw attention to ourselves before we head back downriver to look for the

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boat. By now, she's most likely all broke up anyhow; probably just a waste of time." Jack didn't want to tip his hand. He knew this guy wasn't going to help Bourdon, but still he had an interest in serving himself and his investors. Besides, no sense in telling him what he wouldn't understand.

"Mr. Cecil, what's been goin' on while we were gone?" Jack asked.

"Sit down, gentlemen, and I'll tell you as much as I know. The inquiry into the wreck of the Boston went quickly. The review board's only evidence was she went to ground and sank. They figured most of the crew was killed or had run off so as not to be held accountable if any misconduct was found. It has been well documented that the captain was a man of the bottle. The only evidence given was his drinking heavily at a local bar before heading downriver with the Boston. Without any member of the crew giving testimony about the grounding, the board made its own conclusion, pilot error. Insurance company is expected to pay up for what was lost according to the company's shipping manifest. That manifest, however, says nothing about the machines we both know were on board."

Jack sat and listened and then asked, "What about me and my crew, and the captain and the dead crewmen?"

Cecil sat down on the side of the bed and looked at Jack, "You are cleared of any misconduct. There was no evidence that you had anything to do with the whole incident. As to the death of those

men, they figured it wasn't related to the wreck. It was likely they just wanted the whole thing to go away fast and quiet. Figured Bourdon paid someone off to keep things quiet."

Jack looked at Cecil, "What about you, is there still a reward for findin' the machines intact?"

"Jack, if you find those machines, the owners are still willin' to pay the money. But, honestly, I don't figure you'll find anything in the river but debris, now. You know that Bourdon has drug the river up and down lookin' for the wreck. Do you also know he is aboard a gunboat lookin' for you? That doesn't sound good to me."

Jack got up and went to the window and looked down on the wharf. One of the big salvage boats he'd seen going downriver was now tied up just below the creek mouth. "Have you seen the second salvage boat that Bourdon had looking for the Boston?" Jack asked.

"No, just heard that one came in, late last night. Her stacks have gone cold, so I'm guessin' she's not goin' back out right away."

"Mr. Cecil, how much longer are you gonna be in town?"

"Most likely until the end of next week. I'll take a train back to Pittsburgh after concluding the company's business. But the owners of the machines still want them back, and the reward still stands. If I'm not here, telegraph the First Federal Bank in Pittsburgh. Jack, my information tells me Bourdon is desperate to find those machines. There's a lot ridin' on it for him. Whoever is backin' him is spendin' big money on the salvage boats, and sendin' that gunboat this far upriver tells me they want those crates and what is in them badly.

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Don't get caught between Bourdon and those boxes." D. B. Cecil opened the door, "Gentlemen, if you would excuse me, I have an appointment I cannot miss. Remember, Jack, the First Federal Bank." Cecil closed the door as the three left the room.

"What now Jack?" Brother-in-law asked.

"Back to the boat; we'll head downriver and tie off next to the far shore and see if Bourdon heads upriver lookin' for us."

The three headed down the back steps toward the path along the river. "Jack, where are you going? The suspension bridge is that away." Brother-in-law pointed toward the bridge.

"Let's go south past the salvage boat and see if there's any crew hangin' around along the shore we can get any information out of. Brother-in-law, you've got a bandana in your back pocket like you usually carry?"

"Yeah, but why?" he asked.

"Tie it around your head, coverin' it up some. It'll help t' hide your identity if by chance someone sees you. Ain't likely anyone on the big salvage boat outta Pittsburgh knows you by sight."

Brother-in-law did like Jack asked, and they headed off down along the river. On shore near the walkway were a couple men moving canned goods down to the shoreline. "You fellers need any help aboard that fine big salvage boat?"

The two men, with stern looks on their faces, looked at the three standing next to the river. "Go on, get outta here. This here is a

workin' boat, not a garbage scowl." The second man laughed at the first man's comments.

Jack rubbed his head, giving the impression he was a little on the simple side. "I saw two o' them big boats go by here a while back. The other one get lost downriver?"

"Ain't lost; went on down to Muskingum City. Now go on, get outta here before I calls a constable." The big man moved his hand at Jack and his friends as if to shoo them away. Jack turned to the other two as they started up the long bank and gave them a wink. He found out what he wanted to know.

When they got to the top of the bank, Jack looked back down to the salvage boat sitting next to the shore. "She's returning to Pittsburgh and in no hurry to get there. The other's on its way back downriver. Bourdon must believe we found the cargo and took it off before she blew up. If he believes that, when he gets word that we're upriver trying to make a deal, he'll be coming this way fast."

The three headed up the street toward the suspension bridge. It must've been near seven o'clock by the time they made it back to the boat. Jack went aboard and Billy was sitting nearly asleep against the front wall. "Billy, wake up, where's Catfish and Jeremiah?"

Billy sat forward and rubbed his eyes after being awakened so abruptly. "Uh, well, they went to the hardware store for some supplies Catfish said he needed."

"How long ago? Not sure, I lost track o' time. Can't be more than three hours ago."

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“Three hours? Where in the world did they go and what are they after?”

Billy shrugged his shoulders, “Didn’t say, just said they needed some stuff an’ off they went. Jack, where’s Ell?”

Jack didn’t answer. He went off to the pilothouse without saying a word. Billy looked at the other two. “Did he say anything about Ell to you all?”

“No, I guess I just figured she was still on board when he showed up alone at the house. When did she leave?” Brother-in-law asked.

Billy stood back where he could look up at the pilothouse. “Jack and Ell left last night; I just figured they’d be back together. Never even thought otherwise.” Billy went off up the steps to see Jack.

“Billy, how long before we c’n get underway?”

“Most likely, an hour at the most. I kept the fire banked up and gave it a shot of air from the bellows a couple o’ times to keep it hot. I just need t’ open the hopper an’ add coal to the firebox, if you’re ready. Jack, where is Ell?”

Jack didn’t answer. He looked out the side window to see where the men were on deck.

“Jack, I asked you where Ell is!”

Jack turned and sat down slowly on the bench next to the side window. “I left her at Tilley’s last night. Billy, you an’ I have been through a lot. Whatever happens, happens. That’s the way I always figured it. But somehow the thought of Ell bein’ hurt or worse isn’t

somethin' I can face. I want her out of harm's way. If we make it through this, then I'll figure out where we stand."

Billy sat down next to him, "Did you tell her that?"

Jack sat and didn't answer right away. "No. I convinced myself, after I wasn't there when my parents died, that I would never cause anyone pain again by not bein' there. Bourdon has a gunboat lookin' for us. If I'm killed, well, I guess the good Lord said it was my time. But for her to be hurt because of me, I couldn't face that idea."

"You should've told her how you feel."

Jack turned and looked his old friend in the face, "Billy, I didn't know for sure how I felt until I walked most of the night in the fog with just my thoughts. By morning, I knew if I returned it would be time to have a talk about us with Ell. But for now, I don't expect you to be tellin' anyone how I feel."

"When it comes time for that talk, best it be somethin' just between Ell and you." Billy stood up and went toward the side door. "For now we need to be gettin' downriver and find those crates and get our reward. Don't know about you, but I ain't ready for that damn confederate sympathizer to kick my ass, gunboat or not. The Mary E can outmaneuver any boat on the river, big or small. He may have to chase us in big circles to catch us." He slapped Jack on the shoulder. "Now where in the hell are Catfish and Jeremiah?"

Chapter 18

Return to the Boston

The sunlight slowly crept up the far hillside as the sun began to disappear behind the hill in the west. Dark was coming, and Jack didn't want to spend another night across from Wheeling's lights. He was beginning to wonder if Catfish and Jeremiah had stopped off for a drink and forgotten about why they were here. About then, Jack heard voices from up on the bank above the river's edge.

"Hey, you fellers give us a hand in unloadin'." It was Jeremiah's voice calling down but Jack couldn't see him. The three from the boat headed up over the bank to see what Jeremiah was calling for help with.

A delivery wagon with 'Powell's Machine Shop' painted on the side sat back up near the edge of the bank. In the back were four boxes of dynamite and several sections of pipe. There were also about a dozen of the small wooden kegs Jack had seen earlier being moved to the nail factories.

"Best be careful with that dynamite. Ain't likely to explode, but a feller never really knows for sure." Catfish directed the men to be careful. He and Jeremiah started pulling sections of 1¼" pipes off the back of the wagon. As it fell to the ground it split in half.

Billy looked at Jeremiah. "I don't know why we need pipe, but you got some broken pipe." Catfish laughed at Billy's comments.

Soon the wagon was unloaded and the crew of the Mary E moved the supplies down onto the deck. When they finished, Jack asked, "Now would you please explain why we need more dynamite and pipe cut lengthways? And what're the empty nail kegs for?"

Catfish opened one of the wooden boxes, and inside were rolls of wire and a detonating device to set off the blasting caps. "Jack, I'll explain later, but for now we best be gettin' outta here. There's a crowd gathered over on the far end o' the bridge. Said they wanted to see a gunboat that's headin' this way. I figure a gunboat on the river these days has to be tied to the OSL, which means they're lookin' for us. Time we move down to a darker part o' the river for the night." Catfish might look like a man with not much intelligence about him, but a person would be wrong to underestimate him. "I'll tell you my plans later. Let's get goin' for now."

Jack looked at Billy, "Well you heard the man. Open the dampers and close the vent valves. It's time we get downriver. Brother-in-law and Joshua, get them shore lines loose. Time t' go." Everyone knew his job, and it didn't take long for Jack to move the Mary E out from shore and head downriver.

Catfish came up to the pilothouse as they were nearing the channel, "Where's that little lady?"

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Jack didn't look at him before responding, "Figured best she sit this one out; wouldn't want 'er to get hurt, iffin' we tangle with Bourdon."

"Well, Captain, that's prob'ly for the best. But I'm sure gonna miss her cookin' and that pretty face."

Jack smiled and said, "Best you get below and help them make your cargo fast on the deck."

As the boat eased out into the channel, Jack looked to the point of the island. There, high on the bank, he could see a woman holding an oil lamp. He could see she wore a bright yellow dress, and he thought it must be Ell. She raised her hand as if to say good-bye to the passing boat but held it steady and didn't wave it as someone would to signal a happy good bye. Jack wondered what she felt in her heart as the Mary E moved downriver and out of sight.

Jack called down to Jeremiah to come up to the pilothouse. "We're gonna go just below the next town and put in on the far bank. Sandy beach, and a good place to build two fires on the beach."

Jeremiah looked at him with a puzzled look on his face. "Why are we gonna build two fires and call attention to ourselves by passin' boats, especially if Bourdon's coming upriver?"

"A medicine boat has no reason to hide. With the boat showin' the 'Dr. Hardgrave's, Dentist' side to the main river, and two fires burning bright, they shouldn't give us a second look. He believes we're above Wheeling tryin' to make a deal with the machines and

insurance company. He's gonna be blind to the common things on the river." Jeremiah nodded his head in agreement. "Tell them down below, we'll put into that sandbar about a mile from here." Jeremiah left the pilothouse to return down onto the deck.

The moon was three-quarters full and its light sparkled off the slight surface chop of the river. Jack could pilot easily on a night like this. But it was still hard to see the dark shoreline and the exact spot where he wanted to put his boat ashore. He could see the lights of the small town off to his right and knew it was time to ease into shore. He pulled the plug on the speaking tube, "Billy, cut 'er back. I'll ease 'er into shore along here." Jack then moved the telegraph into the 'SLOW' position.

Jack hung his head out the side window straining to see. As his eyes adjusted, he saw what he was looking for. He signaled 'ALL STOP' as he angled the Mary E into the soft sandy shore. He felt her move as she came to rest for the night on the soft sand and quickly headed down on deck.

"Brother-in-law, you and the rest tie off the boat an' make a fire just to the south o' the boat and then one to the north. Be quick about it. Want anyone seeing us to be thinkin' we're just a medicine boat put to shore for the night. Nothin' to hide. In this moonlight, most likely Bourdon's runnin' the river headin' north." The men made quick in preparing the deception of the Mary E in the night air.

In a short time, two fires burned on shore, and the path up from the shoreline had two lanterns showing the way up over the

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riverbank. Any good medicine boat owner wouldn't want the customers to fall going up over the bank in the dark.

The deception was now complete, and the crew of the boat sat down on the front deck and had some supper while they waited. "Sure miss the lady's cookin'," Brother-in-law complained. Most of the rest grumbled the same sentiments. Jack missed more than the food that the others complained about.

"All right, Catfish, why did we need pipe sliced sideways, and how'd you get it cut that way?"

Catfish finished his beans and wiped his mouth with his shirtsleeve. "I got the machine shop foreman to cut the pipe this way to help with the dynamite." Catfish took a piece of chalk and began drawing on the wooden deck. He drew a crude image of what the Boston may look like, from Jack's description. Once he had the picture, he started his explanation. "If you place dynamite inside the pipe sections, an' take them down onto the Boston, an' place them here along the main deck facin' the wall, an' here along the wall goin' up an' along the top section here, when we detonate 'em, the half pipe'll direct the force of the explosion toward the wall and supportin' structure, cuttin' it off. The pressure wave'll dissipate quickly and not damage the wooden crates in the cargo hold. The gas pressure created by the explosion will enter the space and lift the wooden top structure off the boat. If it goes right, we should be able to blow away the section around the cargo area, openin' the top like a can o' peaches."

Jeremiah pointed toward the drawing. "Accordin' to Brother-in-law, when the crew loaded the crates onto the Boston, they didn't remove the liftin' ropes. I guess they figured they'd need 'em again when it come time to unload 'em, and that's good for us. Once the top section's removed, the two of us'll go down and attach the float bags we made to those liftin' ropes that were left around the crates. The way we have it figured, each crate'll float to the surface below our canvas bags. They'll drift south into shallower water below the turn and, once they're all free, we'll retrieve each of 'em and place 'em on deck. Now, doesn't that sound easy enough?" Most everyone was still absorbing the plan now drawn out on the deck.

"That easy?" Jack said.

Jeremiah sort of laughed, "Well, let's hope it all goes as well as we've planned. She's deep and the dynamite charges have to do what Catfish says they will. And we have to be able to work in sixty feet of water with little to no visibility out of the helmets. And, Jack, I'll need your help on the bottom, too."

Jack looked at Jeremiah, "Never figured I'd be a frogman." He laughed.

Joshua looked downriver into the far turn, "Is that it?"

Coming around the far turn, a boat moving fast and sending flames out her stacks into the air was coming upriver fast. Out on the deck in front of the pilothouse was a carbon arc light searching the banks to find the way. Jack had heard of those lights but had never seen one in action. It was bright as daylight, showing its

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operator the way upriver. The gunboat must have a steam dynamo to produce the power for that high-intensity light.

As she approached, the gunboat shone the bright white light on the small boat tied to the shore. It held the light on the boat looking her over. As she came up nearly straight across the river from the Mary E, she turned the searchlight back to the north. The operator must have been convinced this was just another medicine boat working her way along the river.

The boat was a dark color, making it hard to make out in the night, even with the three-quarter moon shining down on her, but she was big and fast, even for a gunboat. Jack had seen many during the war, but nothing that compared to this.

In about twenty minutes, the fire-breathing boat's stacks disappeared around the turn far upriver. Jack stood up, "All right, let's get goin'. Untie those shore lines and, Billy, gimme steam t' the paddles. It's time we get downriver. By first light o' day I wanna be in the deep turn, and I sure hope the Boston is below us. If I'm wrong we're in deep trouble." Everyone knew their roles and made quick haste to get the boat back to moving downriver.

It wasn't long until the Mary E moved out into the main channel running full out. The moon was directly overhead now, and lay out a clear view of the nighttime river ahead of the boat. Jack figured if the moonlight held out and he could hold this speed, he'd be near the spot where he hoped the Boston lay at daylight.

Jack called down on deck to Jeremiah and Catfish. In a few moments, they made their way to the pilothouse. "Get your divin' equipment ready. Show Brother-in-law about your air pump and have Joshua learn too. Catfish, whatever you're gonna do with your pipe and explosives, get it ready, but don't install the primers until we're ready. Most likely, we're gonna be over the wreck by mornin', if she's where I think she is. Jeremiah, you'll go down first thing and make sure she's there. Once we locate 'er, I'll go down with Catfish's explosives and help place 'em. Bourdon's on his way upriver. Not sure if we'll have more than a day before he comes south again. He'll soon realize we aren't north o' Wheelin'."

Jeremiah looked out the front window at the river in front of the boat. "Jack, you have a bellows pump to use on your boiler to increase heat, don't you? Can we rig that to supply the air to the flotation bags when we get them in place?"

"I don't see why not. Billy can change the discharge piping t' whatever you want. If it helps us do this operation faster, I'm for it."

Jeremiah and Catfish started down the steps. Catfish stopped as he went through the door and looked back toward Jack. "Are you expectin' Bourdon to come after us tomorrow?" Jack nodded.

Catfish turned and stepped back into the dark pilothouse. "Remember those nail kegs and extra dynamite? If Bourdon comes after us, we'll be able to at least make him avoid comin' too close. I'm preparin' a little somethin' with each o' those kegs." Catfish patted Jack on the arm. "His biggest problem is, he doesn't know

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who he's foolin' with. I still owe those confederates a little payback for Andersonville." Jack thought to himself that he owed Bourdon a little payback for Buffington Island. Catfish hurried down the steps.

In the moonlight, Jack turned and looked behind the boat onto the river and could see in her wake the trail of bubbles from the turning paddle leading upriver. He hoped they had time to get those crates before the confederate gunboat returned downriver. He knew that with just the Mary E's maneuverability and Catfish's keg bombs as his only defense, it might be a short battle.

Jack passed only two other boats heading downriver. For most of the night he was alone in the pilothouse while the others were making preparations for the morning. Jack thought about the Boston. Would she be where he believed? Would Jeremiah and Catfish's plan work to open the wreck's twisted hull? And what was Ell doing? It was a long night looking out at the sparkling waters of the Ohio River.

He wasn't sure of the time, but the moon had moved into the western sky making it increasingly difficult to see the water ahead of the boat. But just as he was losing the moon, the sky to the east began to take on the color of morning. He knew before long the sky's reflection on the water would show the water's surface.

When he passed Moundsville, he knew the big turn in the river was just ahead where the Boston went aground over a week ago, but he wasn't sure what he'd find around the turn. By now, daylight was touching the tops of the hills on the western side of the river. Jack

piloted his boat to the eastern side to avoid the sandbar and any salvage boats that might be in the area. As he came around the turn, he looked downriver. It was empty, no boats of any kind. He was relieved and a little surprised.

The deep hole in the river bottom was still a couple miles downriver. Jack hadn't taken into account the drag on his boat from the side load. He'd intended to be on-site by now, but it would be another twenty minutes until they were there.

Jack was comforted by having the river to himself as he passed the sandbar where all this had begun, and he wondered if this might also be where it would end. The sun was now high enough in the sky that it began to shine into the pilothouse and feel warm on his skin. For some reason, he just remembered that today he was going to go underwater, deep into the river. He'd never done anything like this before but knew he needed to help Jeremiah with the crates. His skin felt cold all of a sudden at the thought of that deep cold water.

The rock face in the turn shone bright in the sun's morning light. The rocks had been smoothed by the passage of water over thousands of years. The rock face extended down at least sixty feet to the river's bottom. Jack hoped the stern section of the Boston would be sitting down below.

Jack rang down to Billy, 'SLOW AHEAD.' The Mary E slowed and settled into the water. Jack circled just south of the rock face to where he could see a little further downriver. It was all clear. He turned the boat's bow to the north and eased over the deep spot in

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the river. He called down to Brother-in-law, "Get the soundin' line and call out depths to me. I want t' use the drag anchor t' hold us over the deep spot."

As they moved in front of the rock face, Brother-in-law tossed out the line. It went down to sixty-five feet. He retrieved it and again threw it back; this time it went thirty feet. He called out the reading to Jack. Again he tossed the line over the bow of the boat and again it read near thirty feet. Jack took stock of where his boat was in relation to the steep rock face. The next time the line went out it settled on bottom at fifty-five feet. The next sounding was forty feet, and the next time twenty-five feet. The final reading was between fifteen and twenty feet of water under the boat.

Jack called down to Jeremiah and Catfish, "Throw the drag anchor over the bow and make it fast." The two men pulled the heavy anchor to the bow and pushed it over. Jack signaled down to the engine room 'ALL STOP.' Slowly, the forward motion stopped and the boat began drifting downstream. In a few minutes, the line going to the anchor pulled tight. Jack looked at where the bottom reading indicated thirty feet. He hoped that was the top of the Boston and not the bottom.

"Jeremiah, feed out some line on that anchor until I tell you to stop."

Jeremiah began feeding line through the kevel and watching for Jack's signal. He watched until the Mary E was over what he believed was the Boston. "Tie 'er off. If I'm right, we're there." The

time of truth had come. Jack once again looked up and down the river. They were alone for now. He ran down the steps.

He hurried into the boiler room, "Billy, keep the boiler hot and vent the steam. If we've got to get outta here, we'll need to go fast. No time to bring steam up." Billy understood what Jack wanted. He closed the damper doors and opened the steam vents.

As he approached the front deck, Jeremiah was already putting on his equipment and giving Brother-in-law and Joshua instructions on what they were to do during his dive. "Jack, I'll go down and make sure she's there and how she's sittin' in the river. I'll also tie off a supply line that Catfish can use to send down his explosive devices. Gotta be careful o' the wires to the detonators and not pull 'em out." He looked at Brother-in-law and Joshua, "Remember, if I pull on this line twice it means send the explosive devices down. If I pull three times it means to bring me up. Got it?" The two indicated they understood. "Jack, if the Boston's down there, I'll pull on the rope a half-dozen times; that means come on down. Anyone have any questions? Remember, Catfish has worked with me before so if you have any questions, ask him. And don't quit pumpin' the bellows on the air lines. All right, let's go."

Jeremiah had positioned a long rope ladder over the side with heavy weights attached to the bottom ends. He worked his way over the side and was now making his way down into the water. Down, down he went until his helmet disappeared below the surface. Tiny air bubbles rose to the surface where he disappeared in the green

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water. Soon the rope moved quickly down, as he began free-falling to the bottom. It wasn't long until the rope stopped for a moment and the bubbles came up further downstream. Six sharp tugs on the rope from below. They've found the Boston!

Jack put the helmet on and secured the rope around his waist. He kept repeating Jeremiah's instructions in his head as he climbed down the ladder into the warm river's surface water. Just before he went under, he looked up at Billy who was standing near the edge. His voice was muffled, but Billy understood. "Keep an eye upriver for that gunboat." Billy gave him the thumbs up.

Jack got partway down the ladder and let go. He was slowly falling in a world of green water, and he had no orientation as to where he was. Only the bubbles that passed in front of his helmet told him which way was up. The strange sound of spent air being released from the helmet made the only sounds as he descended. The water grew colder as he went deeper and deeper. Suddenly, his feet came to rest on something. It was hard for him to walk; his buoyancy and the weight belt he wore must not match just right. He floated up with each step. It was dark green but the light from above filtered down further than Jeremiah had said it would. Suddenly, he felt a hand touch on his arm. In front of him he could just make out the silhouette of Jeremiah's helmet in the dim light. He remembered Jeremiah's instructions.

Catfish had already sent down the first piece of pipe, and Jeremiah disappeared into the green world with the half-pipe filled

with dynamite. It wasn't long until the next piece was sent down to Jack from above. He wasn't sure how long Jeremiah was gone until his shadow reappeared out of the green. This time he took two pieces of pipe with him as he vanished. From above, four more came down to Jack, who laid them close at his feet so he wouldn't lose them. Again and again, Jeremiah returned and disappeared into the dark green world.

Jack counted in his head. *He's taken eight pieces, and if his an' Catfish's plan is correct, we should be near ready to ascend back to the world above.* Jack started to become a little more comfortable with his underwater surroundings. Moving about was more difficult than he had ever thought. His buoyancy made his movement unstable. Finally, Jeremiah took the last two pieces of pipe and disappeared into the underwater world.

Jack knelt down to run his hand along the top of the Boston's upper deck. Somehow, its touch made him sure it was her sitting below him. He soon learned to sense Jeremiah's return, each time, by feeling the change in water pressure that moved around him. And in a moment Jeremiah was once again standing in front of him. Jeremiah carefully held the wires from the detonators in his hand and arranged them so they wouldn't become tangled as he was returning to the surface. Jeremiah took ahold of Jack's waist rope and gave it three good tugs. Before Jack could brace himself, the rope pulled him toward the surface and bright sunlight.

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It was awkward for him, but he was able to pull himself up the ladder. In a moment, he broke the surface, and the world of sound returned. He looked up into the bright sky, and it blinded him for a few moments. Slowly, he climbed the ladder and rolled onto the warm deck. "Jack, you okay? What was it like? Could you see down there? What's the Boston look like?" Jack heard the questions but wasn't ready to answer.

As he sat up, he could see Jeremiah coming up the ladder with a handful of wires that he handed to Catfish. After a few minutes, both men sat on the deck looking at each other. "Well, Jack, what did you think about my world below the surface?"

Jack smiled and said, "You can have what's below, I'll take what's above. How can you move around so easy down there?"

Jeremiah shook the water from his hair as he looked at Jack, "I've spent a good bit of time underwater. My weight belt was a better balance for me. The next time, I'll add a little more weight to your belt an' that'll help some. At least you didn't go crazy with being closed in. I had one guy go crazy from the closed-in feelin'. I think we had a little bit of a break. She must be sittin' in about forty feet of water. Still deep, but better than sixty."

Jeremiah stood up and went to where Catfish was preparing the wires that led down to the charges inside the half pipes. "You didn't pull any of them out, did you, Jeremiah? If this is gonna work, they all have to go at the same time."

"No guarantees, old man. Did the best I could for bein' so far down. I just hope your dynamite don't get wet and misfire. I'd hate to have to throw you in to fix the problem."

Catfish looked at him and said, "Just you try."

Jack started up the steps of the pilothouse, "Okay, let's move this boat upstream and set the charges off. Catfish, watch your wires; I'll swing out away from the wreck."

Jack told Billy to close off the steam for a minute so he could move the Mary E out to starboard from over the Boston. "Catfish, you get ready and when I signal, you set off the dynamite."

Slowly, the boat moved to starboard off the wreck. Jack left the drag anchor secured as he moved slowly forward and to the side. After a minute, he gauged where the Boston was in proximity to where his boat was. He knew it would be close and they'd likely get wet, but that was okay.

"Catfish, it's time to see if you're as good as you say you are. Open the top of the Boston."

Catfish attached the last wire to the brass screws and looked around before calling out, "FIRE IN THE HOLE!" There was a short delayed reaction, then there was a rumble down deep and then, two seconds later, the water erupted thirty feet high, sending a wall of water down onto the deck of the boat. Small pieces of wood surfaced but no upper deck. Had it not worked? Then in about thirty seconds, twenty feet downriver, the section of boat that they wanted to remove floated to the surface. It looked like it worked. If

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everything was okay, they should drop right down on the crates, fasten the canvas air bags, and float the ten crates to the surface.

Jack ran back down the steps as the boat drifted back to its original position at the end of the drag anchor. "Jeremiah let's go and get them machines." After his weight belt was adjusted with a little more weight, Jack descended back down into the dark waters. The bubbles from the explosion were still suspended in the water around him. He staggered to stay upright as he carried the lifting bags attached to the hoses down to the bottom. The plan was, Jeremiah would work along the far side, and Jack would attach the bags to the crates on the near side.

After what seemed like a long time, Jack's feet once again touched bottom. This time ropes and cables were on the floor beneath his feet. He used his hand to feel around the crates and hoped what he was feeling were the crates with the nail machines inside. He sidestepped toward what he believed would be where the first box was. He was learning to use his hands to be his eyes. There was just enough light to see green but not what was just a few inches away. After a few moments, he felt no more crates to his right.

He felt up near the top and found one of the lifting holes in the wooden containers. He attached the first bag. Next, he removed his knife from his pocket and cut the lines that held it fast to the floor. Then he moved on to the next one. He repeated this four times. When he came to the fifth, his feet became tangled in what felt like ropes or lines lying on the bottom. For a moment, he wanted to

panic, but he stopped and thought to himself, *Jack, you've been in worse places than this; remember Mudder could've had you killed and cooked for supper. This can't be worse than that.*

Jack smiled to himself and eased the tangle of ropes off his feet. He found the last lifting hole and secured the canvas bag. He wasn't sure how long he'd been underwater and wondered if Jeremiah had finished on his side. It was the first time he'd ever experienced the loss of sensation of time and the world around him. It wasn't something he enjoyed. He stopped and thought about his work. Find the boxes, hook up the air bags, cut the securing ropes, and make sure the airlines are untangled and free. He'd done his job, so he pulled three times on the rope and was quickly pulled toward the surface. His strength about gone, it was harder to climb the ladder onto the deck this time.

He couldn't see who was removing his helmet this time; the glass had become fogged over and the bright daylight affected his eyes for a few moments. "Is Jeremiah up yet?"

From his left he heard, "Yeah, Jack, I'm here. Not sure about the third crate; it was damaged by the explosion or somethin'. Couldn't see, but I could tell with my hands somethin' wasn't right about it. I attached the bag, though, and I hope it holds together."

Jack could see that the hoses coming up over the side of the boat were being attached to the line going into the bellows pump on the boiler. "Well, I guess it's time to see if we can raise what we came after."

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Joshua and Brother-in-law started off toward the air pump next to the boiler. They started pulling and pushing on the handle. With each stroke, the sound of air going down to the canvas bags could be heard. Bubbles began to surface just off the side of the bow of the boat. Jack wondered if some of the bags were leaking too much air to lift the weight.

Without warning, the first bag appeared on the surface, then another, and another. After a few minutes, all ten bags had surfaced. The crates were still suspended beneath the bags and couldn't be seen from above.

"All right, get that lift over the side and hooked to that first crate." Catfish and Billy swung the boom lift out over the water and Jeremiah dove in and attached the first crate. The clicking of the lifting winch sounded with each inch lifted; the wooden container was lifted partway, then left to hang for a minute, allowing the water to escape from inside the crate. When nearly empty, the first one was swung onto the deck, out of the way. The crew performed their tasks as if they'd done it many times before. Crate after crate was lifted and placed on board until only one was left.

Jeremiah called for help, "Jack bring another rope and come in here and help me get it around the bottom of the crate. This is the one with the damaged top." Jack picked up a length of line and jumped in beside Jeremiah. The two men made fast the damaged crate and finally attached it to the lifting line. Before long, all ten crates were on board and secured.

The tired wet men stood looking at the wooden boxes now covering the deck. "What now, Jack?"

Jack moved to the starboard side and looked up and down the river. Coming from the south was a towboat pushing three coal barges and heading toward the north. Jack knew they'd retrieved their prize, but still had a distance to go, and the gunboat was somewhere out there along the way. Jack hadn't let himself get to this point in the plan. *What now?*

"We need to get that drag anchor loose. We'll pull forward and free it from the bottom and bring it on board. Billy, get a full head o' steam up so we can start downriver."

Billy looked at Jack, "Downriver? I thought we were gonna take this to Wheelin' and get our money and live happy ever after."

"We are, but not just yet. North of Parlorton is where they load and unload barges. Coal and cargo are loaded on trains and moved to their next destination. We'll move these crates down there and have them sent north to Wheelin' by train. Bourdon figures we're river men and will never need the use of the train. He's committed that gunboat to the river and findin' us. No way he'll ever look on a train."

Jack headed to the pilothouse and called down to Billy, "Close the vents and open the damper. We're heading downriver."

Jack knew that going downriver would buy him some time. Time to move the crates north, and time to figure out what he was going to do about Bourdon and the gunboat. Bourdon would never give up

finding him and the machines. Billy called up the speaking tube, "Steams up, Jack, you ready?" Jack telegraphed down 'FULL AHEAD.' The Mary E turned out into the channel and headed downriver. Jack looked back north, but the river was clear except for the coal barge that had passed by earlier going north.

Jeremiah was curious about what the machines looked like. He and Brother-in-law decided to open the side of the damaged crate. Inside was a piece of equipment unlike anything either man had ever seen before. "So this is the future of nail making in the country. Jack said the man who could run these machines could make a ton of money if he had the cash t' start them off." Brother in-law ran his hand over the finely machined parts of the new piece of equipment. Sitting on the bottom of the damaged crate was a box much like the one Billy and Brother-in-law retrieved thinking it contained treasure from the Boston a little over a week ago.

Jeremiah moved the box, and it made the sound of coins inside. Brother-in-law laughed as he looked at Jeremiah, "Don't get excited. It's just a box of nail samples."

Jeremiah picked it up and shook it, "Don't sound like nails. What do these new nails look like?" With that, he hit the corner of the box against the deck, dislodging the top. Out onto the deck rolled gold coins. Lots of them.

The two men stared at each other before rejoicing. "We're rich!" cried out Brother-in-law.

Jeremiah looked at the coins while Brother-in-law danced around with joy. They had a confederate marking on them. Jeremiah realized this was gold from the southern treasury. Bourdon wanted the machines, but he also wanted the golden coins in these boxes. Jeremiah took one of the coins and went up to the pilothouse to show Jack.

“Well, Jack, I don’t know what your nail machines are worth, but I sure know these coins are valuable.”

Jack was speechless, he was salvaging nail machines, not gold coins. He quickly realized this made the game much more dangerous than it already was. Jack held the coin in the light and examined it. “This looks like a new gold coin that the South hoped to build its economy on.” He knows that gold in the North is short now, and the government is trying to make silver the coins of its commerce. The South realizes gold is clearly the standard for financial security.

They pulled a board off each of the rest of the crates. No other crate had boxes inside belonging to the Confederacy. No one had any idea of the value of the coins. But Bourdon and his OSL friends would not be happy it was no longer theirs. Under the rules of the river, salvage recovered from a sunken boat is the finder’s property. Jack didn’t figure Bourdon would see it that way.

“What now, Jack?” Brother-in-law asked excitedly.

Jack looked at him and the others, “We stay with the plan. Get the nail machines to Wheelin’ and deal with Bourdon. The gold is

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worthless to us if we're dead, and even if Bourdon doesn't get us, the OSL will. For now, we shouldn't say anything about the gold."

"But Jack," Jeremiah interrupted, "they'll know we have the gold since we have the ten crates."

Jack looked at Jeremiah and the others, "Good bit o' damage to the cargo hold, and we had a hard time getting' them out. One crate was badly damaged and lost in the wreck sixty feet down." Everyone smiled and nodded their heads in agreement at the story to be told.

"How far south are we goin', Jack?" Jeremiah asked.

"We'll go a couple more hours to Parlorton. We can drop that old medicine boat alongside o' my houseboat, and then move to the freight unloadin' terminal north o' town. We c'n make arrangements to unload the crates and ship 'em to Wheeling by rail." Jack turned to Brother-in-law, "When the outsides o' them boxes are dry enough, I want you to paint over the Southern Investment Company information and real neatly put a new owners name on them, shipped to Sarah Cecil, Wheeling, West Virginia. We'll pay ahead of time with the money Jeremiah got off Miller, and the shippin' company will put them in storage until she comes to claim them. No one will ever suspect anything."

The crew was excited about the gold and their newfound riches. But Jack knew they still had to deal with that gunboat and Bourdon. It was near on five o'clock by the time the Mary E made it to the unloading depot. Jack used Jeremiah's gold coins that he got off Miller to ship the crates north to Wheeling. The men watched as the

boxes were loaded off the deck and into the railcars. All but the damaged one.

Jack moved the Mary E back downriver to the wharf in Parlorton. He sent Billy ashore to get a few supplies and see if any rumors were goin' around at the local bar. When he returned, the only thing he found out was that the same old men were tellin' the same old war stories. The goings-on upriver hadn't come down this far along the river yet. It was almost as if time stood still since they left to go north a short time ago.

Late in the evening, Jack eased the Mary E in alongside his houseboat for the night. A quick supper was prepared and eaten, and the men found places to sleep for the night. Jack sat in his favorite willow branch chair on the front porch of his floating home. He eventually realized he was the only one left awake. He turned the kerosene lantern off, and it took only a few minutes until his eyes adjusted to the darkness. It was a clear night and the moon gave a blue cast to the tiny sparkles it made on the surface of the water. Stars filled the sky with numbers beyond the ability of the most learned man to be able to count. The night filled with stars and the bright moon was Jack's only company. Jack looked toward the heavens, "Lord I've asked for a lot in my time, but this time I need Your help for not only my sake but for the good men who have come along with me this time. Iffin' You can see Your way to watch over us the next few days I would be in Your debt. Oh, one more thing, watch over Ell. She's a good woman and I left her without so

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much as a good-bye. I hope she understands it weren't for me but for her well-being." With that Jack closed his eyes and drifted away into the world of sleep. The frogs and crickets along the Ohio River sang their songs as darkness surrounded the weary travelers in the night.

Chapter 19

The Gunboat

The night sounds were replaced by the sounds of mourning doves, cooing as they came to the river's edge for an early morning drink. Jack was awake before first light. He wasn't sure how long he'd slept, but he felt much more rested. The condition of his back in the old chair? Well, that was a little different story. It ached from his night's sleep. Jack stood up and stretched the protesting muscles in his lower back. It wasn't long until he had a pot of coffee heating on his wood stove. He looked for coffee that didn't have any remnants of the French coffee he'd sold the locals.

As Jack sat back in his chair and drank his coffee, he thought about how he made bad coffee that tasted really bad in the morning. It was almost hard to believe he was sitting where this whole adventure started only nine days ago, and as ridiculous as it sounded, that he was now plotting a plan that would take him back upriver to face Bourdon and take on a gunboat. Take on a gunboat? Well, he'd stepped in it, and now he'd have to get it off his shoe or he'd smell it for a long time—or be killed trying. No choice, he had to figure out how to end this and still survive.

The gold and reward money were not important to Jack. He'd never been a man who believed money was the driving factor in his

life. The river and the adventure were what made him happy. But a little money to fix up the houseboat he called home would be nice. Before he could spend a dime, though, he needed to end this problem with Bourdon.

He heard the sounds of someone stepping onto the boat and felt the gentle rock from the person's weight coming aboard. "Jack, you have to make the worst coffee on the whole damn Ohio River." It was Billy. He sat down in the same place he had a little over a week ago. "Well, Jack, what's the plan?"

Jack sat for a moment half grinning at Billy before answering. "Billy, how many years have we been workin' the river together?"

Billy thought for a short time, "I'm not sure; best I can recollect, for as long as I can remember in some ways. O' course, since we pulled this boat outta old man Pendergrass's field, we been salvagin' and movin' some local cargo around the river together. I don't know for sure, but when my time comes I'll remember that I had a friend I spent the better part of my life with."

Jack smiled, "Billy, we got ourselves into a mess. I can't figure no way out and stay on the river doin' what I was born to do. Bourdon's comin' and he means to get what is his and kill us in the process. No way he'll leave us alive. I guess I can accept that, but it's harder for me to think I'll get all o' you killed in the process."

Billy leaned back in his chair and didn't respond to Jack's statement for a while. "Jack, he can't kill us right off. He needs those crates in one piece, and he may not realize we even know about

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the gold. He ain't gonna come up shootin' and killin' at first. Too big a chance o' him destroyin' his cargo and losin' the gold. He's comin' after us to get what he wants. He can kill us at any time. If we choose the time and place, we may have a chance, slim I guess, but a chance."

Jack sat forward in his chair, "You're right; his overconfidence could work to our advantage. Whatever we have to defend ourselves with is of no importance to him. He has a gunboat. No one on the river can challenge a gunboat. That may be his weak point. Remember that time we went to New Orleans?"

"Jack, you promised you'd never speak of that again! How was I to know she was married to the bartender?"

"No, not that. Do you remember how that little Chinese feller whipped that big sailor's ass, down on the wharf that night?"

"Yeah, I remember, but I don't see how some little Chinese feller can help us."

"Not the Chinese feller, but the way he fought the big guy. When you asked him how he did it, after you lost money in the waging on the fight, remember what he told you?"

Billy thought for a moment, "Well, he said he used the big man's own size against him and kept misdirectin' his attention durin' the fight. Still, I'm not sure how that scrawny Chinese feller against a three-hundred-pound ocean sailor won. But it wasn't even much of a fight. It hurt me just watchin' the big guy get whipped by that little man. Jack, I hate to tell you this, but Bourdon's not gonna stand toe-

to-toe with you in a fair fight. He's comin' down on you in a big black gunboat, with cannon shells comin' at us once he gets what he wants."

"We have something he wants very badly, and we have something else he don't have, knowledge o' the river. If we use those two things to our advantage against 'im, we might have a chance, like that little Chinese feller. We gotta catch the eight o'clock train to Wheelin' this mornin'. Wake Jeremiah up, and tell 'im we should be back by nightfall."

"But, why, Jack?"

"No time, we have to hurry if we're gonna catch that train. I'll explain on the way." Jack tossed the rest of his coffee overboard and went into the cabin and picked up his captain's hat.

Billy woke Jeremiah and told him what Jack had said. "No time to explain, Jack said we'll catch the five-thirty back. Should be back here before dark." Jeremiah was still trying to absorb what Billy told him as the two men disappeared over the top of the riverbank.

Parlorton's train depot was a good way off from the houseboat's location. Jack and Billy plowed their way through the tall horseweeds to make a new path that was quicker to the railroad tracks. Once they were there, they could follow the tracks to the station. By the time they got to the tracks, their clothes were wet from the nighttime dew on the tall weeds. Billy was trying to catch his breath. "Jack, slow down, you're gonna kill me." Jack was so far out of breath he

couldn't answer; he only waved to Billy to follow him alongside the tracks.

It must've been nearly a half-hour until they made their way onto the station platform. The men sat down on a nearby bench and panted like dogs while trying to regain their air. They hadn't yet even realized how wet their clothes were. Jack started to regain his composure and asked Billy, "I guess I should've asked back at the boat. Have you got any money?"

Billy felt into his pocket and came up with some silver coins. "This enough?" Jack took the handful of change and bought two round-trip tickets to Wheeling. Just in time. The conductor stepped onto the platform as the empty freight wagons moved away from the box cars. "ALL ABOARD!"

Jack and Billy made their way into the railcar and sat in the last seat near the backdoor. Both men sat quietly until the train was heading out of town along the river. By then, they were both breathing normally again. "All right, Jack, do you wanna tell me why we had to get to Wheelin' in such an all hell-fired hurry?"

"Yeah, we're goin' t' see Charles Bourdon." Jack said quietly.

Billy turned quickly toward Jack and said, "Are you crazy? He's gonna kill you. You said that yourself. How is that like that Chinese feller's fightin' strategy? 'OH! I think I'll go to the big man and let him kill me and my friend Billy, just for the fun of it.' If that's your plan, I'm gettin' off in Moundsville and headin' back south. At least I have a chance that way."

Jack just looked at Billy, "Are you done? Do you wanna listen to my plan?" Jack began to explain his strategy as the train rolled along the river heading north.

Mile after mile, Jack and Billy talked over the plan, refining it. Just below Moundsville, Billy said to Jack, "I think it might work. It's dangerous, but I think it might work. If you're right about Bourdon never losin', this plan just might work. I just hope when you see him he don't kill you right off. If that happens, I go to Plan B: Head south and get outta his way."

Jack smiled and said, "Fair enough."

The two men, having devised a plan, sat back and enjoyed the rest of the trip to Wheeling. They talked of the river and days gone by. Jack even wondered what Ell was doing. They never spoke of what they were going to do in the next few hours.

The train eased into the Wheeling station and positioned the freight cars to be unloaded first. Jack and Billy couldn't wait for the conductor to announce for people to disembark the train. They took the long step down onto the red bricks. Jack looked up at the conductor still standing on the train. "What's the time, sir?"

The conductor pulled out his pocket watch and looked at the face, "Quarter t' twelve."

The two men hurried off to the wharf to see if the gunboat was sitting there. When they arrived on Front Street, Jack scanned up and down the river. No gunboat to be seen. He'd have to ask the wharf master if he'd seen the dark boat. The path down to the wharf

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was well worn from wagons and men traveling back and forth to the river's edge. Standing on the front of the wharf and holding a clipboard was a man in a white shirt and stiff round hat. That must be the man he was looking for.

"Excuse me, sir, are you the Head Wharf Master?"

The man straightened up and looked at Jack with a commanding look, "Well, I am the man in charge, if that's who you're looking for."

"I have a delivery of goods to a boat called the Southern Sky. Someone said it was a gunboat, but I know it must've been a mistake. Most likely, they meant a boat carryin' guns upriver to the arsenal in Pittsburgh," Jack said, holding his hat and rolling it in his hands.

"You say you're makin' a delivery to the Southern Sky, did you? Well she's tied up on the north end of town where the river and the north road come close together. She's takin' on supplies up there. Best you be hurryin' if you got something for Mr. Bourdon; he's not one who likes to be kept waitin'."

Jack acted humble to the wharf master as he waved his hand and headed back up to Front Street with Billy. "Jack, that's a couple o' miles up there. We're gonna have to hurry."

Jack picked through the change Billy had given him. "We should have just enough to ride north on a trolley car. We may have to try and get a ride back south to the train station after we see Bourdon."

The two men quickly rounded the corner onto Market Street and looked for a north-bound trolley. It wasn't long until the car came along. It seemed to take forever to move up the hill past the end of

the suspension bridge. Jack looked at the bridge crossing to the island. He thought of Ell. Billy sensed what he was thinking, and laid his hand on Jack's shoulder. "When this is over, there'll be time to answer those questions."

The trolley car stopped and started as it made its way to the north end of town. Before long, Jack saw the tall black stacks of the gunboat sitting alongside the river road. Jack nudged Billy, "There she is."

The car moved onto a turnaround and stopped. "LAST STOP! ALL PLEASE DEPART!" The conductor was as mechanical as most Jack had seen in town. He and Billy were the only two passengers.

The operator pulled the car around and started back downtown. Jack and Billy looked at each other, "Well here we go." As they approached the dark gunboat, Jack looked over how she was built and tried to figure how much water she displaced when she was moving. "What do you think, Billy? She six or seven feet down in the water?" Jack asked.

Billy, with the keen eye of an engineer, looked at the hidden side paddle covering. "See the center of the shroud around the paddle? If you figure she's midway, the center o' her paddle extends at least six feet down. This boat needs at least eight to ten to be real safe. She was built for the big waters o' the Mississippi. Those who built her never figured to bring 'er up the Ohio."

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Two armed men in black clothes stood at the top of the ramp. As Jack and Billy approached, one of the men, in a deep accent, challenged the two. "Halt, who goes there?"

Jack turned to Billy before he answered, "Now remember: If I ain't outta the damn thing in an hour, you head off back down to the train. Don't wait around, get to Parlorton and make your way south, head up the Muskingum, and try and hide out until this blows over."

"I said: Who goes there?" the impatient guard asked once again.

"Go tell Mr. Bourdon Jack Dulin is here to see him."

The guard stared for a moment. "Just one of you?" he asked.

Jack turned to Billy and said quietly, "I guess Bourdon didn't pick the cream o' the crop for guards. Remember, one hour."

Jack turned and started toward the stern-faced guard, "Best you go tell your boss I'm here. If he finds out you held me up, he sure is gonna be pissed."

The two guards looked at each other quickly, "All right, follow me, but he stays here." The guard pointed toward Billy.

Jack followed the guard down the ramp, onto the deck, and through a heavy wooden door with metal plating on the outside. He swallowed hard when it went shut behind him and he was inside the dark vessel. The guard hurried along the narrow passageway to a set of steps that went up to the second deck. At the top, a door opened into a brightly lit room decorated in the finest French furniture. From the far side, Jack heard a door open. "Good afternoon, Mr.

Dulin. Jack, so glad you've come to see me. Saves me the effort of chasing you around the river to retrieve my property."

Bourdon gestured for Jack to sit at the table where two glasses and a bottle of fine whiskey sat. Bourdon began to pour Jack a glass but stopped momentarily. "I take it you do drink before five, don't you, Mr. Dulin?"

Jack picked up the glass without a word and drank it down. Then he returned the empty glass to the table. "Brandy?" Jack asked.

"Yes, I have it brought in special. I acquired a taste for it long ago and never really got over it. Mr. Dulin, you have something of mine and I want it back. The only questions are, do I kill you now, or do I let you bring my property to me then kill you?"

Jack didn't answer. Instead, he picked up the bottle and took a big drink straight out of the bottle. "You know, Charlie, this is good stuff. Never had it before, but I could get to likin' it."

Bourdon looked at Jack and grinned, "I'll say this much for you, Mr. Dulin, you got more balls than any man I was prepared to kill."

Jack leaned forward toward Bourdon, "You tried once and screwed it up, so what makes you think you'll be any more successful the second time?"

Jack had now confused Bourdon and, for a moment, he was off his game for the second time since they first met. "What do you mean 'second time?' We've only met one time before. I demand you tell me of what you speak, sir."

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Jack paused for a moment before he said anything, "Okay, here's how we're gonna do this. I want one hundred thousand dollars for all ten of your machines, still sealed in the crates. I'll deliver them to you at a place of my choosing. You will deliver the money to Mr. D.B. Cecil at the River Front Hotel in Wheelin', by tomorrow noon. He'll then send me a telegram sayin' you have done what I asked. After I receive the telegram that he has deposited the money, I'll send him the instructions of where and when you can come and pick up your ten crates, no questions asked. I get my money and you get your machines and save face with your handlers. Sounds like a good deal to me, Charlie. Oh, one more thing, if I don't show up downriver by mornin', or if you fail to send the telegram, the crates will be involved in a terrible explosion and lost to the bottom of the river. Do you understand, Charlie?"

Bourdon was taking it all in and still trying to figure out what Jack meant by second time? "Mr. Dulin, you intrigue me, and not many men can do that. And what is going to stop me from making the deal and taking the machines and then killing you?"

"Well, a little thing called murder. My associates have hidden away a lady who is still healin' up from a terrible beatin'. Most thought she would die. But, as luck would have it, she survived and is in a safe place away from here. She tells some interestin' things about you and your friends down south. She also said she would tell the U.S. Marshalls the same story if asked. Anything happens to me

or my crew, and she sings the song of a southern bird spillin' her guts. Do you understand, Charlie?"

Jack couldn't tell if he had shaken Bourdon's confidence or just raised his anger level. He was cool and quiet for a moment. "Jack, I can call you Jack, can't I?"

Jack looked at him, unblinking, "No, Captain Dulin will be fine."

"Captain Dulin, let me show you my boat." Bourdon walked to the door from which he had entered, opened it, and invited Jack to join him. Exiting the brightly lit room, the two men went up another set of steps onto the third deck. No door was on the entrance to the pilothouse. The room was finished in fine wood. Each window had below it, a heavy steel blind that could be slid in place if needed. The pilot's wheel was as big as any Jack had ever seen. Make handling the boat easier if required. The ropes to the engine room bells were white and clean, unlike the *Mary E's* that were well-worn and tied together in a couple places. There were four speaking tubes going below.

"What's this thing got? Four engineer stations below deck?" Jack asked as he pointed to the shiny brass tubes.

"No Captain, this one goes into the boiler room. The next one goes to the engine compartment. The next to the forward guns' station, and the last to the side gun emplacements. From here, I can command every aspect of this fine boat." Jack moved around as he looked at the finest pilothouse he had ever seen.

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As they were talking, two officers stood near the back in a formal stance. "Jack, let me introduce Captain Beauregard Steppington. He has thousands of hours piloting on the Mississippi River. He can anticipate every mood and condition of a river and adjust quickly." Steppington was apparently ex-military from the way he held himself. A tall man with salt and pepper hair and a beard that was neatly trimmed and combed. His eyes were a cold blue and showed no emotion. Jack would bet he came from some fine old southern family that lost everything in the war. The captain, without moving his body, tipped his head forward toward Jack.

"And this fine, young man is his second in command, Lieutenant Charles Bourdon the third." He had his father's hard eyes and stone face. He didn't acknowledge Jack at all.

"Well, Charlie, you have a fine boat, and your captain has a great many hours on the river downstream from here. But he would find it a little more challengin' to pilot on the mighty Ohio River. A man's got to know the changin' currents and bottom in a river that's ever-changing. Most good pilots I know got their real trainin' pilotin' on the Ohio before they went down to that bathtub they call the Mississippi. Hell, my deckhand could run around that big creek."

Jack could see the captain glaring at his comments, but he dared not respond without Bourdon's say-so. Young Bourdon was most likely harder than his father. The old man had worked his way to the top of the organization for many years. He'd gotten his hands dirty before becoming a gentleman. Young Bourdon was born into his

position. He'd never had to submit to any man except his father. Jack realized these three men all wanted to kill him and throw his body into the boiler's firebox. He thought to himself, *Don't overplay your hand. They now hate you just enough to be controlled by Bourdon, but push it too far and he may not be able to control them.*

"Well, Captain Dulin, now that you've endeared yourself to my bridge crew, let me show you what gives this boat its sting." The two men started for the side door. Jack looked back at the two men standing fast in the back of the pilothouse. They never moved but followed Jack's exit with their eyes. Jack could feel their anger.

Down two sets of steps until they reached the main deck, clean and polished as the rest of the boat, but more practical. Each of the six gun emplacements was partitioned off from the others by heavy wooden planking. Jack figured this was in the event one gun exploded, or a shell came through the gun port. The wall would protect the other gun emplacements. Powder and shells were neatly placed in the middle of the room for easy access to the gun crews. Near the front, on the floor, were two large doors that opened to the bottom of the boat. Over the two access doors was an overhead lift to bring more powder and shells out of the bottom of the boat. On the far side, a couple men were cleaning the guns but the rest of the crewmen were somewhere else on the boat.

Jack pointed toward the brass guns. "I'd heard you had the Val Verde guns on board. Fine-lookin' pieces of armaments."

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Bourdon gestured for Jack to come closer to the guns. "Yes, we took them from the federals during the war. I'm sure they'd like to have them back. They can have them if they come and get them after the battle. I don't think they have the stomach for that, though. Let me show you the power of this boat."

The two men headed toward the back of the boat and into the boiler and engine room. It was as clean and polished as the rest of the boat and well-lit by new electric lights. "Captain Dulin, have you seen one of these new dynamos? It provides power to the lights and we even have a refrigeration system for our galley. This boat is the finest on any river it chooses to go."

Jack looked around at the room before asking Bourdon, "How's she do in battle?"

"We haven't yet been challenged. If the federal government tries to interfere with us, we'll respond with the full force of this boat. One more thing before you go, Captain." Jack knew he had been inside for a good while and Billy would be worried. Bourdon went forward and opened a heavy metal door onto the front deck. He moved toward the front of the boat. "Captain, as you can see, the bow of this boat is long and narrow; it is hardened by ten-inch timber encased in three-quarter inch steel. At full power, the Southern Sky can cut any boat on the river in half and never even slow down."

Jack looked down at the impressive bow and said, "How many boats have you sliced in half, Charlie?"

Bourdon chuckled, "Captain Dulin, only a fool plays with a Southern Cotton Mouth; our snakes will hunt you down and bite you, even if they're cut in two. Don't mistake that this boat has never had to prove itself; just know that when she does, the outcome is guaranteed."

Jack walked to the edge of the boat, and he could see Billy looking down impatiently. Jack turned to Bourdon, "Charlie, let's both understand: you can have your machines and I get my money. Part of the money goes to the lady with the information to go away and be safe. We can all have what we want, if you do as I say. Do you understand?"

Bourdon stood tall with his hand clasped behind his body in a gentlemanly pose. "I understand, but you understand that if anything goes wrong, you can't run far enough that I will not find you. Your money will be there tomorrow. Good day, Captain Dulin." Bourdon turned and quickly disappeared inside the heavy dark door.

Jack made his way around the side deck to the ramp leading off the boat.

"Where the hell have you been? It's been nearly an hour since you went inside!" Billy asked.

Jack motioned him to follow, "I'll explain as we go. Have to get downtown and see the banker before we catch the five-fifteen." As they hurried down the street, Jack explained what had gone on and his plan. After a few minutes, a trolley car was going to pass them heading south. The car had several people aboard that most likely

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had just gotten off work at the hospital. The conductor was watching the many wagons and people moving up and down the street in front of his trolley.

Jack looked at Billy, "Come on, let's jump on the back of this thing; he's busy watchin' the traffic." As the car passed, in a quick motion, the two men ran and jumped on the backside of the car. Neither the passengers nor the conductor took any notice of the two men's arrival. They had gotten away with their scheme. Jack continued to tell Billy of his visit inside the dark gunboat.

Before long, the trolley moved into the downtown area and stopped at the bottom of the hill near the River Front Hotel. The regimented conductor turned to direct people from his trolley. As he did, he saw the two stowaways stepping off the back deck. He knew he hadn't picked them up and received their fee for riding. He also realized there was nothing he could do about it except give them a stern glare. Jack and Billy never noticed as they headed for the hotel.

Jack knocked on the door and was soon greeted by D.B. Cecil. "Mr. Cecil, we have your client's machines in a safe place. But Bourdon is not going to let us live because we have them."

The banker's eyes lit up at the good news at the recovery of the machines. "When can I have them?" he asked quickly. He never said anything about Bourdon's wanting to kill them.

Jack told Cecil, "Write this down so you get it right. You screw this up, we could all die." The banker now showed a little concern. Jack explained to Cecil as much of the plan as he needed to know.

He also told him Bourdon knew he was involved, so it was important this work for all their sakes.

Jack's parents had left him a small bank account after their deaths. Wasn't much, but he always knew they wanted him to have something after they passed away. Jack had left it alone as kind of a reminder that his parents always thought of him, even when he may not have let them often know he thought of them. Jack instructed Cecil to deposit the money from Bourdon in his bank account and take the receipt to Sarah. She would contact Jack to let him know of the transaction. Jack also told Cecil that after this was settled with Bourdon, the money for the reward would be handled in the same way and he would be told where the nail machines were hidden. The three men said their goodbyes, and Jack and Billy hurried back to the train station to catch the five-fifteen south.

As the two men sat down in the back of the train car once again, Billy turned to Jack, "I'm hungry, and we ain't had anything since last night. Bourdon's not going to need to kill me; I'll just starve to death."

Jack laughed, "When we get to Parlorton, we'll go by the Main Street diner and get a good supper. Who knows? It might be our last." The two men laughed. Jack picked up a day-old paper and the headlines were, "Cleveland Calls Congress into Session." The story told of the President trying to deal with the stock market panic and the shortage of gold. The story blamed free coinage of silver as the problem. Jack remembered the teamster and his beliefs that

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government should stay out of men's lives. The writer of the story felt the same way. The train headed south along the river once again.

Chapter 20

The Plan

It was near eight-thirty by the time the train pulled into Parlorton. Billy's stomach had protested for the last hour. He was hungry. Jack hoped the small Main Street Diner would still be open. He figured it should be because of the billard tables and bar in the back room. The owner kept the business open until the last train of the night came through. Often, travelers going to the River View Hotel would stop and have dinner before going to their rooms. Jack knew if the front wasn't open, the backside bar would be. Either way, they would get some supper for Billy. As they approached, they could see a few people still sitting at the tables having dinner.

Jack and Billy sat down in the corner booth next to the door. It wasn't long until the owner saw them and came over to take their order. "Hey, Jack, I didn't know you were back in town. The wharf man said your boat left a week and half ago and he hadn't seen you since. Funny thing though, two men were in here earlier today lookin' for you. Didn't say what they wanted, just lookin' for you."

Jack didn't make much of a comment before Billy asked what the special of the day was. "Swamp Rabbit, young and fresh. Jimmy Hoskins trapped 'em last night, and I cleaned 'em myself this mornin'. Cooked 'em with potatoes and carrots most o' the day.

Comes with a plate o' hot rolls. Can I get you two fellers a plate?" They ordered two specials and two beers.

Billy leaned toward Jack, "Wonder who's lookin' for you?"

Jack waited for the man to serve the beers before answering. "Not sure, most likely Bourdon's got agents workin' their way downriver lookin' for us. Good thing no one recognized us comin' downriver."

The big man returned to the table with their supper of wild muskrat and hot rolls. Billy asked, "Jack, you got a credit here? If I remember correctly, we ain't had any money since the first trolley ride this mornin'."

Jack looked at Billy, "Do you think they'd take some o' Catfish's turtles in trade?" The two men laughed as they finished their supper. Jack went on to explain he brought supplies from downriver on occasion for the owner, and in return, he gave Jack meals on occasion. The arrangement worked out to both men's advantage.

After finishing dinner, Jack and Billy made their way back to the houseboat on the south end of town. Counting Joshua, the four men they left there this morning were sitting on the front of the boat listening to stories told by Catfish of his adventures on the river. "Where have you two been?" Brother-in-law asked.

Jack and Billy made their way onto the boat and sat down with the others in the light of the lantern. "We've been to Wheelin' an' made a deal with Bourdon," Jack told the group.

“What kind o’ deal? He’s gonna kill us as soon as he gets what he wants.” Brother-in-law stood up, and it was evident he was more than a little pissed at hearing Jack’s statement.

Jack motioned for him to sit back down and hear the rest of it. “You’re right, but me an’ Billy have a plan to take care of Bourdon, get the reward money, and get a hundred thousand dollars from Bourdon for the machines. Is it risky? Yeah. But I don’t see any other way out of this. We should get word tomorrow that Bourdon has given the money to D.B. Cecil, that banker we met at Brother-in-law’s house last week. Once he has the money and has taken the deposit slip to Sarah, she’ll send a telegram to us, lettin’ me know she has the slip to prove Cecil made the deposit. Then I’ll send her instructions on where and when Bourdon can get his machines.”

Jeremiah sat on the rail of the boat smoking his pipe. “Jack, even if he gives the banker the money and you give him the machines, what’s gonna stop him from killin’ us anyway? Don’t forget the gold coins from the new South. Have you thought about them?”

“Yeah, I have. There are about two hundred gold coins in the box. Best I can tell they’re the Confederacy’s twenty-dollar gold pieces. I think they’re some sort o’ samplin’ o’ coins they intend to mint in the new Confederacy. If you noticed, they have a reddish color to them. Most likely, they have a lot o’ copper and zinc melted in with the gold. Their value isn’t necessarily that great, but they sure as hell don’t want the federal government to know they’re mintin’ a new gold currency. Bourdon also believes we have someone who

will give testimony about his involvement in the murders of the crewmen on the Boston. To be honest about it, I've run a bluff on him to buy us some time and the advantage of meetin' 'im on the river at a place of our choosing. If I's a bettin' man, I'd bet most every man on that gunboat wants to kill me. In fact, I'm countin' on it. Men who are like-minded in angry pursuit sometimes make bad choices. Our only real chance is they want the machines more than they want my ass. Don't want anyone here not to be aware of the risk we'll be takin' the day after tomorrow."

Brother-in-law asked, "Why the day after tomorrow?"

"We need every advantage we can get. Tomorrow, during early mornin' on the river, and hopefully with a little surface fog, we have to remove the top of the old medicine boat and make it look like there are ten crates sittin' in the boat. Come day after tomorrow, the old boat will be lookin' like a small cargo barge with ten crates showin'. The one nail machine we have will sit uncovered in the front so Bourdon can see it from a distance. He doesn't know that we found the gold, and we'll leave it that way. After that, I'm countin' on his hate for me to do the rest. No guarantees this won't go bad. I wouldn't blame anyone who chooses not to come. Hell, we're goin' up against a gunboat with nòthin' more than our wits. Don't want any man's life on my hands who don't believe we can do this. We have to destroy that gunboat, or I'll never be able to travel this river again."

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Everyone sat for a minute and mulled over what Jack had said. After a couple minutes, Joshua stood up and said, "Best I get a good night's sleep. I never took on a gunboat before, and I wanna make sure I'm well rested."

The other men expressed the same sentiment and some of them moved to find their beds for the night, but Catfish remained sitting on the bow of the boat. Jack looked at Catfish and asked, "What do you think? You've been in tight places before."

The old man stood up, walked over, and sat down in the chair next to Jack. "Men like Bourdon and his friends tore this country up one time before. Them that knew o' the South's plans let it go too far before they tried to stop it. The war pulled the heart outta this country. Brother fightin' brother. Men slaughtered on hundreds o' forgotten battlefields. Their bodies buried in the earth and their only marker is the green grass over them. Families never knowed where their loved ones died and went to eternal rest. I don't know if we can get lucky enough to stop this madman and if it will make a difference even if we do. But I know I'm gonna try. If nothing else, we'll bring attention to the OSL and its plans. Government politicians are all tied up in blamin' each other for the hard times in Washington. If they'd spend more time fixin' things, instead o' findin' blame, it would go a long ways to help our country. I guess I got one more fight in me, and this is gonna be it. I'll be lettin' my turtles go in the mornin', in case I don't make it."

Jack had come to realize that he'd judged this old man by his appearance when he first met him. But after being around him, he was proud to call him friend. "Catfish, how come you didn't stay in the army after the war?"

"My outfit got word that a reb train was movin' prisoners to Andersonville from a prison in Tennessee. The officer in charge knew the train had to cross the bridge over the river. The crossin' could be seen for near a mile ahead of the train. The Major figured if my outfit could blow up the bridge, the train would stop, and he could attack it and remove the federal prisoners. Daylight came and the order was given to blow the bridge. The Major got his brigade in position to take out the guards and release the prisoners when the train stopped. We blew the bridge and could hear the train comin' in the distance. The only thing was, it didn't stop. Most likely, the damn-fool engineer tied off the train's dead man and fell asleep. Train never even slowed down. Run flat into the river and a lot o' good boys never even got outta the locked box cars. I can still hear 'em screamin'. Some o' my men and I went into the water to try and help let the men out of the sinkin' cars. The Major and his troops withdrew because two reb patrols come in on us. Most o' my men, along with myself, was captured and sent 'along to Andersonville with the men that survived the wreck. When I got out of Andersonville months later, I headed home on the Sultana. Well, you know that story. After that, I took to workin' the river and fell in love with its peace an' quiet. Never much looked back on the war after awhile. I

figure if I can help prevent Bourdon and his friends from ever tryin' to succeed again, I'll have made it right with some of them boys I seen die."

Jack leaned back in his chair and said, "It's late, and the mornin's gonna bring a lot o' work. Best we be gettin' some sleep."

Catfish stood up, and as he walked past Jack, he patted him on the shoulder. "Good Lord's with us. He might not save us, but He'll be there come day after tomorrow when we meet Bourdon." Catfish went off to bed. Jack sat back in his chair, propped up his feet, and closed his eyes for the night.

Jack woke early to the smell of bacon cooking and hot coffee. And if he wasn't mistaken, he also smelled biscuits. He hadn't smelled biscuits since... It had to be Ell! She was here! Jack opened the door to the small cabin and expected to see her there.

"Jack, is everythin' okay?" It was Joshua, cooking on the small stove in the cabin.

Jack looked at Joshua, "I thought by the smell o' biscuits that Ell had returned."

"She showed me how to make the biscuits when we were travelin' downriver. They're not as soft as hers, but with a little honey they ain't half bad, even if I do say so myself." Joshua offered Jack a couple biscuits and a cup of coffee. Jack felt some disappointment in Ell not being there, but he knew the danger they faced, so it was for the best. He took the coffee and biscuits and thanked Joshua.

Before long, Joshua's cooking had awakened everyone to the smell of breakfast. The small crew sat on the front deck eating and enjoying the cool morning air.

"All right; let's get started," Jack said. "Jeremiah, you an' Brother-in-law start to tear off the cabin on the old medicine boat. Save the support boards and throw the rest in the river. Me an' Joshua will head over to the warehouse next to the train station. Out back, they keep boards they removed from cargo that came in on the train. I'll get Frankie to load 'em on the delivery wagon and bring 'em here to the top o' the bank. Catfish, I want you to take some o' the nail kegs and fill 'em with explosives that can be set off with a rifle bullet. Don't be shy o' packin' 'em full o' dynamite and black powder and containers o' coal oil. Billy, I want you to check the paddle's assembly, engine, and boilers. Don't want no problems tomorrow when we have to move and move fast. Make sure the air bellows pump is workin'. I want them boiler fires as hot as possible."

Brother-in-law looked at Jack, "How about tellin' us the whole plan, Jack. It's about time."

Jack looked at the men now staring at him, "Let's get these things done, and I'll tell you about the plan this afternoon. Got a few things still to work out in my head for tomorrow." The men grumbled a little but went about their assigned tasks.

Jack handed Jeremiah a piece of paper and pencil. "Jeremiah, I reckon you can write well enough. I need you to write a message I'll telegraph to Bourdon when I get the message from Sarah." Jeremiah

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sat down and Jack began to tell him what to write. When he finished, he asked him to read it back. "Sounds good; I hope Bourdon understands it."

Jack took the paper and told Joshua to follow him up over the riverbank to the warehouse. They could hear the sounds of hammers busting boards as the cabin of the old medicine boat was being removed.

This time, the horseweeds along the river were dry. Good sign that it would rain later that day. Jack hoped the cool rain on the warm river water would form a surface fog for the morning.

The warehouse was a busy place in the mornings. Shipments were being moved over to the train station's landing platform to be put on rail cars. Jack saw Frankie, the warehouse boss, directing shipping crates around the busy dock. "Hey, Frankie, how're ya doin' today?" Jack called out.

Frank looked over his glasses at Jack and the boy coming up on the corner of the platform, "Whatta ya need, Jack? I got several shipments to get ready before the 8:30 to Parkersburg comes in."

Jack just smiled, "Don't need much, how 'bout some of those empty cargo crates you got out back?"

Frankie went back to his clipboard, "Take all you want. I ain't got time to show you the way."

"Frankie, one more thing. I need someone to move them over to where my boat's tied up."

Without looking up, Frankie let out a deep sigh. "All right, but it'll be about an hour. Gotta get these shipments ready."

Jack nodded his understanding and raised his hand in a gesture of thanks as he and the boy headed toward the back of the warehouse. Joshua asked, as they headed to the backside, "What are we lookin' for?"

Jack pointed out some of the large wooden sides of boxes lying in a pile. "Like those," Jack said. "We hafta make Bourdon think we have all those nail machines still in boxes on that boat. Want him to come in real close so he don't suspect nothin'." Jack and Joshua started moving the boards around into a pile they wanted to take back to the boat. After awhile, they had the ones they needed. "I wish we had a few more, but we'll make do."

About the time they finished sorting, Frankie came around the corner of the warehouse and called down to Jack. "You ready? I got a wagon comin' 'round to load up those scrap boards. What the hell are you gonna do with all o' them, Jack? Too lightweight to build anything permanent."

Jack walked over to the warehouse platform and looked up at Frankie, "Me and Billy's gonna build a camp on the Sisters Island and run our hook line in the area for a couple^o weeks. This wood'll give us a dry place to store our stuff on the island while we fish."

Frankie nodded his head toward Jack, "Bring me a mess o' Red Nose Sucker if you get any. Wife grinds 'em up and makes some good fish cakes with them suckers." Jack assured him that he would.

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A young boy not much older than Joshua brought the wagon and a single horse around to the back of the warehouse. Jack and the two boys loaded the boards onto the wagon. When they finished, Joshua started to climb on the wagon. "Joshua, I want you to go over to the telegraph office and wait for a telegram to come in for me. You c'n read, can't you, son?" Joshua nodded his head that he could. "If the telegram from Sarah says she has the deposit slip from the bank, give the operator this message and tell him to send it back to her in Wheelin'." Jack handed the short message to Joshua, along with a few coins to pay for the telegram. "When you send it and they signal they received it, head back to the boat." Joshua took the message, looked at it, and told Jack he understood. Jack climbed up on the wagon and waved good-bye to Joshua as he headed off to the telegraph office.

Jack and the boy exchanged only a few words as the old horse made no hurry heading down the road south of town. Jack wasn't sure of the time, but knew by the sun it must be getting near noon. He hoped the top section of the old boat had been removed by now. As the wagon pulled alongside the riverbank above Jack's houseboat and the Mary E, he could see that the top of the old medicine boat was gone. In the slow river current, pieces of boards that had been removed were floating nearby. Jack could see Catfish standing on the front deck drinking a cup of water.

"Hey Catfish, get them other fellers and come up here t' unload these boards." Catfish threw up his hand to signal he'd heard Jack's

request. Before long, the men from the boat were removing the boards from the wagon and moving them down onto the old medicine boat. Jack tossed the boy a coin and thanked him. The young boy turned the old horse and wagon and headed back toward the warehouse.

Down on the boat, Jack explained that he wanted the boards to be put together so, from a distance, it would look like the old boat had ten cargo crates on it. "When Bourdon looks through his glass, I want him to see what he believes are his nail machines. With that one left open in the front and the machine visible, I hope that should convince him that his machines are there and I held up my end of the bargain. I hope he figures we haven't found the gold hidden in one of the crates."

Jeremiah sat down on the edge of the boat and lit his pipe. "Jack, so you make him think we have the machines on the barge. Just as soon as he discovers there's only one, and no gold, he's gonna come after us. I don't see how this is a plan where we survive."

"He'll never get onto the barge to find out. Just as he pulls that gunboat up next to it, I'll fire a rifle shot into one o' them nail kegs and blow the whole damn thing to kingdom come."

Jeremiah stood up and walked over next to Jack. "We ain't got enough explosives to destroy that steel plated gunboat. Most we'll be able to do is scar her up a little."

Jack looked around the faces of the men who were now waiting for answers. "I know we can't destroy the boat. But if we can set 'er

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afire with some tar barrels and coal oil, we'll give 'em somethin' to deal with. And when they come after the Mary E, we'll have one more surprise for 'em."

Brother-in-law said, "Jack I know this boat is more maneuverable than the gunboat, but still we can only outrun 'er for so long. We need more of a plan than that."

Jack looked at the men, "Right now, Joshua is waitin' for a telegram from Sarah. When it arrives and says she has the bank slip for the money, he'll send a telegram to Bourdon. It'll tell him to meet us at daybreak in the middle of the long stretch of river most of you know as The Shoot. Most likely, he and his crew will head downriver lookin' for us. His captain doesn't know where The Shoot is on the river and that's in our favor. Captain Steppington isn't familiar with the Ohio River, but his arrogance won't let him believe it makes any difference. His experience is all on the 'real' river as he sees it, the Mississippi. I'm countin' on his not knowin' the river an' believin' it makes little or no difference. Bourdon's nail machine will be visible in the middle of the river on the medicine boat early tomorrow mornin'. With the cabin removed, he'll see them crates all lined up nice and neat. All he has to do is come and get 'em. Then we'll spring the trap and keep our fingers crossed that it works."

"Why The Shoot, Jack? That stretch o' river is straight for several miles, so why there?" Jeremiah asked.

"The plan is for him to chase us. We're more maneuverable and should be able to stay out of his gun sights. He'll only have the two

front guns that he can fire at us with. He'd have to turn the side guns to fire them in our direction. The two front guns are artillery guns. Need to find their target by firin' and adjustin' for accuracy when on solid ground; they weren't made to be accurate on a movin' boat. We keep movin' left and right, and speedin' up and down. It'll make it difficult to get a good shot at us. And if the coal oil and tar barrels are still burnin' on the front deck of his boat, the smoke'll blind the gunners. We have to make them chase us. That's the only way we can win this battle." Jack sat back and looked at the men.

Brother-in-law had sat quiet for most of the discussion. Then he started to laugh out loud. "You're gonna try and introduce that gunboat to the bastards, aren't you, Jack?" Jack nodded his head. That was the plan.

Billy stood up, "All right, let's get those crates built and get this boat ready for tomorrow."

"What do you mean, introduce them to the bastards?" Catfish asked.

Brother-in-law headed off toward the medicine boat, "Come on. I'll explain it to you as we go. We need to get your explosives and tar barrels onto the boat. Come on."

Jack stepped onto the medicine boat next to the front crates, "Catfish, can you rig the tar barrels and coal oil t' blow out the front o' the crate toward the oncomin' boat?"

"How far are we talkin', Jack? If I put too much explosives under the barrels, it'll blow 'em into a big ball o' fire and they'll burn

out pretty fast. If you wanna blow them onto the gunboat and then burn, I'll need a piece o' flat steel plate. I'll place the explosives behind the plate to blow it forward, and rig a blastin' cap t' set off the oil and tar as it flies through the air toward the gunboat." Catfish seemed confident he could do as Jack asked.

As Catfish started to work on the explosives, he turned and looked back at Jack. "How good a shot are you? Hittin' a barrel from a couple hundred feet is gonna be hard. The target boat'll be driftin' and we'll be on a movin' boat. The gunboat'll be pushin' a wake before its bow, movin' the medicine boat around a little as it approaches. Jack, if you don't hit the barrel with your shot, we're gonna be in trouble quick."

"Don't worry; just make sure you rig your explosives correctly. We need that distraction and hope it pisses off Bourdon and the Captain. They have to want to kill us badly and not do it from a distance with the front guns."

Jack and the crew began working on the old medicine boat to create the illusion of a small barge with the cargo on board. Inside the wooden boxes, Catfish assembled the tar barrels and coal oil to be blown toward the gunboat by the explosion of the barge. It all looked like it was coming together. Jack just hoped it all worked as planned.

"Catfish, I think we oughta tie your small workboat up here until we get back. Not sure what's gonna happen and I wouldn't want your boat to become a victim of whatever happens tomorrow. If it

goes badly, you can make it back here and still have your boat.” Catfish agreed.

It must’ve been near three o’clock when Joshua came over the bank with two telegrams in his hand. He was outta breath as he hurried to where Jack was working. “Here, Jack, one is from Sarah, the other is from that Bourdon feller.”

The first telegram from Sarah was short and simple: ‘Money deposited in bank. Stop. Be careful. Stop. Love, Sarah.’ The second was just as short and blunt: ‘Daylight. Stop. Have merchandise ready. Stop.’ No name attached.

Brother-in-law asked, “What does it say?”

“Sarah has the slip for the money and she loves you. Bourdon will be there in the mornin’.” Jack handed the two pieces of paper to Brother-in-law and went back to work.

By evening, they had assembled the small boat to look like a barge carrying cargo. Everything looked to be in place and the one nail machine was sitting where it could be easily seen from upriver. The men pulled the barge alongside the Mary E and tied her off. All was ready for the morning. Jack fired his old Springfield Model 1873. A trap door single shot rifle. One shot and one chance was all they were gonna get. He fired it a couple times at a small target along the shore in the fading daylight. He wanted to make sure his sights were dead-on. It was an old gun but Jack was confident he could make the shot. He was reminded by Billy that he would only get one shot.

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If he missed, Bourdon would know it was a trick and open fire with his big guns.

Joshua and Brother-in-law cooked up some supper. Some fried potatoes from a nearby farm's field and pieces of bacon. They opened a couple bottles of store-bought whiskey they'd forgotten about. They laughed and talked of old girlfriends and drunken brawls. Brother in-law even told Catfish about where his ear was and his hopes to have a feller in Muskingum City make him a new one. Everyone talked about the good things they'd had in their life. Billy even told the others about Jack's selling, to the locals, his special elixir to cure heat chiggers. Grain alcohol, castor oil, and Epsom salts were the main ingredients, along with tincture of iodine for color. Nearly everyone he sold it to that summer got a bad case of the runs. They all laughed at the story.

Near the end of the evening, Jack looked around at his friends sitting and having a good time. "You all are friends and you've put a lot of trust in me. If it goes bad in the mornin', try an' get to the West Virginia shore. Train runs north a couple times a day. Make your way to Wheelin', to Sarah and Brother-in-law's house. Divide the money up among those of you that make it. Best you leave town for a while. Bourdon may want to take revenge on you 'cause o' what I tried to do. Joshua, I asked the banker to make arrangements for you to attend a fine military school in Wheelin'. He agreed to help you no matter what happens to the nail machines. The rest of you, I just wanna say I've been proud to have you be part of my

family. I would ask that one of you find Ell and tell her, well tell her I hope she's well."

No one said anything for a few moments. Then Catfish said, "Gentlemen, I think it's time we ask for a little help for tomorrow. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgives us our sins, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil and that gunboat comin' to find us in the mornin'. Amen."

From the others a gentle "Amen" was heard.

"We'll head north about three in the mornin'. Best you all try and get some sleep." The men each got up and went their different ways. Billy sat down in the same place as he did that first morning they started this adventure. He filled Jack's glass and then his with the last of the store-bought whiskey. The two men sat and talked late into the night. Neither could sleep, and they passed the night remembering the good times. The sounds of the night accompanied them as they watched the fireflies fill the night sky.

Chapter 21

Tar and Brimstone

Billy had begun working the fire in the boiler around two o'clock. By three, he had enough steam pressure he told Jack they could move away from the houseboat and start upriver. Joshua had gone below to the boiler room and was helping Billy with the fire. He pumped the air bellows and fanned the coal flames until the red glow from the firebox reflected off the dimly lit walls inside the boiler room.

From the speaking tube came the sound of a sharp whistle. "Billy, are we ready to move the Mary E to her appointment?"

Billy responded, "The lady will do us proud; let's go." The telegraph rang up 'SLOW FORWARD.' Joshua opened the main steam valve and watched as the piston began moving back and forth, turning the connecting arm. In the night under a full moon, the small boat and her crew started toward their fate.

Once Jack got her in mid-river and his eyes adjusted to the moonlight, he signaled down to Billy, 'FULL AHEAD.' The paddle began pushing the dark Ohio behind her as she moved quickly upriver. Jack figured they would be at the stretch of river known as The Shoot a little before daylight. The bright moon led their way north.

The warm late evening's rain had cooled the water's surface temperature, creating a layer of fog on the river. Jack had studied this section of the river in his mind many times as they came north that morning. He knew it well and knew where he wanted to be when the gunboat came around the far turn. Jack also knew the bright moonlit night would have the Southern Sky running full out downriver. Captain Steppington wouldn't know where the stretch of river known as The Shoot was, until he saw the lights of Jack's boat.

When they entered The Shoot, Jack maneuvered his boat to cut through the surface fog into mid-channel. He pulled the plug to the speaking tube and called down to Billy, "Give me twenty revolutions." Jack knew that would be enough to hold position, at least for a while.

The sky in the east began showing the first light of the approaching new day. Jack stood quiet, looking out toward the north on the early morning river. He wondered if he would see it again after today. In the far distance, over the tops of the hills to the west, he could see a yellow glow and sparks from a steamer coming downriver. He judged it was still three miles upriver, but coming fast. It could be the regular packet boat heading toward Muskingum City for farm produce, or it could be Bourdon's gunboat. In a few more minutes, the river began to show the light of day reflecting down from the sky. The surface fog covered the river's slow-flowing water and was in no hurry to disappear. Then, in the distance, the flames coming from the stacks of a fast-moving boat came into sight

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at the head of The Shoot. It was the Southern Sky. Her boiler's fires were red-hot, throwing flames and sparks high into the dawn sky. She was moving down the river quickly to her appointment with Jack.

Jack knew it would take ten minutes for her to run the long stretch of river to get to his location. He also knew she'd have to begin slowing soon or she'd run past Jack and the prize that awaited them in the middle of the river. He called down to the engine room, "Billy, it's time to engage the mid-boat rudders and tie down the safety. Tell Joshua to pump the bellows and get me all the pressure you can. Remember, one bell and I take 'er hard right; two bells and I'll take 'er hard left. Watch the telegraph for the engine's signals."

In a few seconds, Jack heard Billy from below, "Good luck, Jack; the Mary E's as ready as she'll ever be."

Jack called out onto the deck below to cut loose that barge with the false crates. He then instructed Brother-in-law to go below to the engine room and help Billy. "Jeremiah, you and Catfish get to the bow and keep a lookout when I tell you to. Keep your heads down. That boat's got sharpshooters on board. Don't want to lose any of ya to a stray bullet."

Jack saw the barge begin to float free. He telegraphed below, 'SLOW REVERSE' on the engines. The Mary E began backing away from the free-floating barge in the middle of the river. With each passing minute, the river grew lighter in the oncoming morning. Jack kept looking at the river on the port side of his boat for signs of the

bastard rocks peering through the fog that covered the river's surface. He hoped they stayed hidden for a short while longer.

Upriver, the Southern Sky was headed toward the barge at full speed. Jack signaled down to Billy 'ALL STOP.' He waited until the Southern Sky had committed to a course down the river toward the barge. He signaled down below, 'SLOW AHEAD.' He began to ease the Mary E toward the far side of the river. He was careful to stay at about two hundred feet behind the barge and to the port side.

As the gunboat approached, he could tell she was going too fast. Captain Steppington had misjudged the distance in the early morning fog as Jack had hoped he would. Steppington signaled 'ALL STOP' to his engine's forward motion. He then signaled to reverse to the engine room to slow the big heavy boat's downriver speed. Her deep draft in the river and heavy bulk made her difficult to handle in such a midstream rush to slow down. As the Southern Sky approached, he began to gain control of the big dark boat's speed. But Jack knew he was now heavily committed to approaching the small cargo barge waiting in the middle of the river and the surprise that awaited them. On the gunboat, Jack could see the forward gun ports were open. The brass guns could be easily seen awaiting the order to fire from the portholes. She was prepared to send shells Jack's way once they had recovered the barge alongside.

Jack could see four crewmen come on deck as the big boat approached the floating barge. He knelt down on the windowsill and took careful aim along the rifle barrel toward the small wooden keg

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on the back deck of the barge. He used his years of knowledge to gauge the approach of the massive black boat to the waiting barge.

When he figured the distance was just right and the front of the barge was pointing toward the Southern Sky, he fired a single shot from his Springfield. At first, there was only a small explosion on the backside of the barge, not what he expected. The deck crew of the gunboat had a few seconds to run for the open hatch in the bow. Then, after what seemed like ten seconds, the front half of the barge exploded sending flames over the front of the gunboat. A second later, a final huge explosion erased the barge from the surface of the river.

For just a second, Jack couldn't see anything for the dense black smoke and falling debris. As it cleared, he could see the front of the gunboat now burning in heavy flames. Jack thought for just a second, "Old Catfish knew his stuff and had brought tar and brimstone onto the gunboat."

The towering flames covered the front of the boat and Jack knew they wouldn't last long. He could see the flames suddenly shoot from the two tall black stacks as the Southern Sky was coming to life. That's when he heard the first reports of gunfire from the front guns. They were shooting blindly through the ferocious flames, but still they fired away.

Jack signaled down to Billy, 'FULL AHEAD.' Billy opened the steam valve faster than he'd ever done it before. The connecting arm to the paddle shuddered as it tried to start the paddles turning at so

high a speed that quickly. The Mary E's paddles rapidly came up to speed. Jack turned the Mary E toward the big gunboat and headed straight at her burning front deck. Both boats were heading toward one another at full speed. The Mary E was a third the size of the gunboat and her front bow wasn't designed to be used as a ram. If the Southern Sky hit the Mary E, she'd be sheared in half in seconds.

In the pilothouse of the gunboat, Captain Steppington and Bourdon knew they were about to cut this pain-in-the-ass boat and its crew in half. Bourdon was upset at the loss of the machines and knew it wasn't going to be received well by the other members of the OSL. But he'd have the satisfaction of killing the man who robbed the organization of the prize machines. He'd enjoy watching this piss-ant of a man die. He had cost him the machines, sample coins from the treasury, and one hundred thousand federal dollars. He knew in his own mind, however, that he could recover that cash from the banker with a little strong-arm encouragement.

The flames on the front of the gunboat had started to burn down. Still, inside the pilothouse, the smoke from the burning tar filled the air, making it hard to breath. Captain Steppington stood close to the front port window and looked at the small boat heading straight at him. "What's that fool doing?" Below him the brass guns continued to fire at the oncoming boat.

Bourdon looked down on the front toward the firing guns. "Idiots! Dulin's closing the distance between us and them. There's

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no way we can adjust fire and hit them coming directly at us that fast.”

As the two boats neared collision, Jack rang one bell and put the Mary E hard over to the right. Billy pulled the clutch on the starboard paddle allowing it free spin for a few seconds. The Mary E, with both the mid-boat rudders and the stern rudders hard over to the right and the starboard paddle disengaged for a few seconds, almost jumped out of the way of the big gunboat's forward motion. The sudden move of the small boat caught Captain Steppington off guard. He'd never seen a boat big or small move that quickly into a turn. Jack straightened the Mary E out and headed north at full speed. The big gunboat would need near a half-mile to turn and come north after the smaller boat.

Bourdon began screaming at Steppington, “Turn this damn thing around! Don't let them get away!” Steppington was angry at Jack, but now he was becoming angry at Bourdon shouting orders at him. Bourdon grabbed Steppington's arm firmly and demanded, “Did you hear me Captain? I told you to turn around and go after them!”

Steppington pushed Bourdon and pressed him against the wall of the pilothouse, “Sir, I am the Captain and I give the...” The sound of a gunshot was heard, and Steppington fell to the floor.

Bourdon, with a small smoking pistol in his hand, looked down at him. “Fool, you should have followed orders.” He turned to his son who stood unflinching at the sight of what just happened. Bourdon looked at him, “You are the Captain, go after that boat. Now!”

The new Captain instructed the crewman at the pilot wheel, "Stand away; I'll take over." Young Bourdon moved the wheel hard right and began to turn the big boat at full speed. Below, equipment not lashed down began rolling across the decks inside the gunboat. The barrels of powder for the guns rolled toward the port wall. The big boat shuddered from the enormous force on her rudders. The deep bow sliced through the water as the tall stack showed her heavy lean into the quick turn. She must've been at fifteen degrees list in the midst of the turn. Water in her boilers moved around, exposing tubes to the flames with no water on the inside to keep them cool, a dangerous thing for the big boilers. The engine room crew was afraid the heat would quickly damage her tubes. The boilers rumbled as the water returned to the superheated sections of the boiler tubes and flashed into high-pressure steam.

Jack looked back and couldn't believe his eyes at how fast the big boat had turned in the river. He thought Captain Steppington had far more experience as a pilot than to try such a dangerous maneuver. Perhaps Jack's plan of pissing him off had worked better than he thought. But now the big boat was completing its turn and would soon be bearing down on him fast. Fire and heavy dark smoke billowed from the tall stacks, filled with millions of red sparks. Jack knew the boat was operating in dangerous territory. But still it came.

Jack looked ahead to the shoreline along the far side of the river. He knew where he wanted to begin turning his boat one more time to the south, hoping the gunboat would still pursuc. About that time,

a shell from the Southern Sky's forward gun sliced through the side of the false stack. The shell continued through the backside of the pilothouse and blew out a section just in front of the pilot wheel. Jack saw fire and smoke erupt from the bottom of the stack as it began to tear loose and fall toward the starboard side of the boat. As it fell away, it pulled the support cables loose that held it in place. The crowned stack fell and took the Mary E's own stack with it. Both stacks now fell on the top deck, damaging the roof before rolling over the side into the river. With no stack in place to funnel the flames from the boiler below, they erupted straight from the opening behind the pilothouse. Jack knew the boards on the roof would quickly begin to burn.

It was daylight now, and the two boats were in a deadly game of cat and mouse, steaming full speed up the river. Jack stuck his head out the side window to call to the two men down on the front deck. "Catfish, bring buckets o' water up here, quick! Jeremiah, stand near the bow and watch for rocks in the water ahead of the boat! Stand far enough forward so I c'n see you! Point left or right to guide me!"

Jack saw a big white-barked Sycamore tree on the riverbank. He knew that was the upper end of Bastard Rocks. The gunboat was closing fast on the Mary E. Jack looked back through the smoke and fire from the boiler and could tell the gunboat was closing on his stern.

In the pilothouse of the gunboat, Bourdon and his son stood confident that in just a few minutes their bow section would cut the

small steamer in half. They both stood tall and arrogant in the satisfaction of killing the men on the boat in front of them. Bourdon had forgotten about the machines and the money. Now it was all about revenge. The only thing he was going to miss was looking Dulin in the eyes when he killed him.

At that instant, Bourdon remembered those eyes and where he had seen them before. At Buffington Island during the war. *That's why he said I had tried once and failed.* Bourdon clinched his jaw muscles and said out loud, "Not this time, Dulin! You're going to die!" In just moments his gunboat would run over the small boat with black smoke and flames now chasing along the top deck.

Jack looked back and pulled the bell twice, hard left. He turned the wheel hard over to the left and toward the Ohio shoreline. Again, Billy pulled the clutching lever, this time on the port side. The Mary E rolled heavy to the left as she turned, just seconds before the gunboat would have run her over. For a second, smoke from the burning deck filled the pilothouse blinding Jack. He looked back through the smoke and could see Catfish and Joshua throwing buckets of water on the top of the burning deck.

On the bridge of the Southern Sky, Bourdon grabbed the wheel and began turning his boat toward the burning boat. Young Bourdon called to his father, "Dad we can't turn that fast. We're out of the main channel; we draw nearly seven feet of water. It's too shallow."

Bourdon didn't listen, "Shut up, and help me turn this wheel. They're not going to get away this time!"

The big boat once again rolled heavily toward her starboard side. Below deck in the boiler room, the crew was still trying to recover from the first big turn. Rivets on number three boiler had started to leak. Water to the boiler feed pumps was fluctuating wildly allowing air into the pumps causing cavitation within them. The erratic water supply, filled with air, was causing hot spots inside the boiler tubes. The engine room was beginning to fill with steam. Still Bourdon continued to turn the big boat, even as calls on the speaking tube pleaded with Captain Steppington to stop his maneuvers. The crew couldn't know Steppington lay dead on the floor.

Jack could see the gunboat was blowing steam from her safeties. She was in trouble. But Jack also knew his boat was in trouble with the stack blown away and part of the deck on fire. He knew Bourdon's hatred would now drive him to follow Jack south through Bastard Rocks. Jack knew his shallow draft would help him get through the field of big sunken rocks. Still, Jeremiah had to guide him around the ones close to the surface that he couldn't safely pass over.

The gunboat was completing its turn to follow Jack downriver close to the Ohio shore. Below, crew members had started to abandon ship as the boilers rumbled and more rivets in the boiler plate walls were beginning to fail. Still, Bourdon pursued Jack down the river, unaware he was heading into an area where the bottom was

covered in large rocks. Bourdon looked over to where his son had been holding the wheel on the other side. He was gone. He'd abandoned his father in his craziness.

Jack watched Jeremiah as he held his hand to the left and then quickly moved it back to the right. He watched and gave Jack all the help he could in moving down the river through the field of rocks. Suddenly, the Mary E rocked heavily toward the right. The bottom of the boat had hit a rock that Jeremiah missed in the dark water. Below, Billy could hear water coming in below his feet. He went to the speaking tube, "Jack, we're takin' on water."

Jack couldn't stop to answer. He looked back through the smoke and fire and could see the blackened gunboat still coming fast toward him. Suddenly, the gunboat hit a hidden rock below the water's surface. Great jets of steam blew out the portholes and doors from the erupting boilers. The boat lurched to the left and then, in a blinding explosion, the great dark gunboat disappeared into a huge fireball. Steam, smoke, and fire were everywhere around where the boat had been just seconds before. Now there was only falling wreckage from the smoke-and-debris-filled morning sky.

Jack pulled back on the telegraph, sending below the signal "SLOW AHEAD." He began to move to the port side and back out into the main channel. He called down to Billy, "Close the dampers on the boiler. Bring everyone up here to fight the fire on the top deck." In a few minutes, the fire and smoke slowed. Billy and the

men from down below were throwing buckets of water onto the smoldering top deck.

The crew of the *Mary E* stopped for a moment as they stood and looked at the burning remains of the gunboat now rolling onto her side, a victim of Bastard Rocks and the *Mary E*. She settled in the water with her starboard side just above water and burning heavily. Her two big stacks still smoldered with flames and fire from inside the engine room. Jack figured the boiler must have blown right before she hit the rocks. Either the impact with rocks, or the boiler blowing, set off the powder magazine.

Catfish stood near the edge of the top deck looking over at the sinking boat as she burned. "The last time I saw anything like that, it was the *Sultana*."

From below in the engine room, Jack could hear Billy yelling up to the pilothouse, "Jack, we're takin' on water! We need to get a canvas over the side to try and cover the damage."

Jack looked around at the top deck and could see the fire was now extinguished. The top boards still smoked in a few places. He called out, "Joshua, you and Catfish pour more water on the smokin' deck boards. Then go below inside the cabins and make sure no fire is inside the walls or ceilin'. Jeremiah, you and Brother-in-law come with me to see how badly we damaged our bottom."

Jack and the two men hurried down the steps into the engine room. By the time they got there, Billy had pulled a section of the floor decking up to see into the boat's bottom section. Jack could

hear the water but couldn't see where it was coming in. "Jeremiah, can you get over the side and stretch a piece of canvas over the damaged area? The water pressure should push it into place and slow the flow until I c'n crawl in and see if I c'n make a repair. Brother-in-law, go up to the wheelhouse and move the boat close to the West Virginia shoreline. Bring 'er port side as close to the beach as you can. If she goes down in close, at least we won't lose 'er." Brother-in-law took off toward the bridge. "Billy, give 'im a little steam to move us in close to the shoreline."

Slowly, the Mary E inched toward the shore as Jeremiah cut sections of canvas to apply to the damaged hull. Jack cut pieces of oakum and found a hammer and wedge to use to try and repair the damaged bottom boards if possible when Jeremiah's patch slowed the water's flow into the bottom of the boat.

By the time they neared the shoreline, the Mary E was beginning to list to port. From the speaking tube, Brother-in-law called down, "Captain, we're as close as I dare get 'er."

About then, Jack heard the sound of sand and gravel sliding along the bottom of the boat. He ran out onto deck where Jeremiah was rolling the canvas up preparing to enter the water. "All right, the damage should be right below us. You'll have to feel with your hands to find the place it's leakin'. Roll the canvas over the damaged area and it should help to slow the water. I'm gonna crawl into the bottom and try an' brace the damaged area with cribbin' an' then

pack any cracks I find in the damaged boards. I just hope the holes aren't too big or we'll sink to the bottom right here."

Jeremiah wasted no time going over the side into the water and disappearing below. Jack hurried back inside, found a lantern and his tools, and lowered himself into the opening in the floor. As he looked up at Billy, he noticed blood running down his side. "You're hurt; what happened?" Jack asked.

"Best not worry about that now. Get down there, Jack, and see if you can stop that leak. I'm gonna try to use the pump to help keep us afloat." Billy grabbed Jack's arm and looked him in the face. "Jack, if the water gets too high, you may be trapped down there. I ain't got my pay yet for this trip. I'm figurin' on havin' a good time in Wheelin', so you need to hurry up and give me my money. Now, you get down there and fix that damn hole and don't drown in the process."

Jack swallowed hard and dipped his head under the floorboards. There must've been six to eight inches of water already in the bottom of the boat. Jack held the lantern out in front of him to try and see if he could tell where the water was coming in. He could still only hear the sound of it. In the closed space, its sound echoed off the surroundings making it hard to tell where it was coming from. He knew it was forward and on the port side. He would just have to try and crawl in and find its location with his hands.

The bottom boards were rough, and crawling over the support ribs made it hard to hold up the lantern. He'd stuck the hammer and

other tools inside his shirt. As he listened, trying to locate the leak, he could hear sounds from below the boat. It was Jeremiah, and he was close. Jack took his hands and pounded on the bottom. In a second, Jeremiah responded. He must be just in front of the next rib support. Jack crawled over the support and began running his hand over the bottom boards. There, in the place next to a rib, he could feel water rushing in with his hand. He looked for a place to hang the lantern off the floor supports over his head. He found a place, but the water level was nearly touching the bottom of the lantern already. Jack had to work quickly or he'd lose his light in the dark bottom of his boat.

He felt around the damaged area and could tell two boards were pushed upwards. Not broken, only cracked and pushed up. If he could drive the cribbing boards in place and push the boards down, he could then fill the cracks with oakum. They may have a chance.

Jack removed the two cribbing boards he'd carried with him inside his shirt and positioned them over the damaged bottom section. It was difficult, but he managed to drive them into place and push the bottom boards back down. He couldn't get them to go as far as he hoped, but he knew it would secure them for now. The water was still rushing in between the damaged seams.

Feeling with his hand, he began pushing the packing into the larger crack. The water pressure kept pushing it back toward him. There was only one way: hold his breath and sink below the water's surface and use both hands. One hand to push it into place and the

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other to hammer it in. He looked at the bottom of the lantern; the water was now touching it. Jack took three deep breaths and disappeared below the surface. He opened his eyes, and the lantern above gave an orangish glow below the water's surface. Jack felt for the crack and forced the oakum into the opening. Still holding it with his left hand, he began hitting it with the hammer in his right.

After what seemed like minutes, he came to the surface gasping for air. As he did, he felt down to where he'd placed the packing to see if the water had forced it out of the opening. The end of the packing was still inside the crack. Jack took the hammer and wedge and began driving the material into the open seam along the bottom boards. Jack once again looked at the lantern; the water level was now nearly up to the wick adjustment. Jack knew that soon the lantern would be extinguished by the rising water level. He continued to feel the bottom and drive the packing into place.

The last piece was nearly in place when the dimly lit space filled with water and went dark. The water had reached the burning wick. Jack was now alone in the dark, feeling for damaged places in the bottom. He could no longer hear the flowing sounds of water. The only sounds in the wet space were his own moving around in the water that was nearly up to his face when he was on his knees. He knew if there were any more damaged areas he couldn't fix them in the dark and water-filled space. He turned and moved toward the light coming in from the opening in the floor just ahead. As he made his way toward the light in the engine room, he began to feel some

relief. He reached the opening and laid the hammer and wedge above his head onto the floor. He looked up and could see Billy and Catfish's faces looking down at him.

Catfish offered him a hand to help him up from the bottom of the boat. "Did you get the packin' into the cracks?"

Jack, still short of wind, nodded his head to say he believed he had. He lifted Billy's shirt and saw what looked like a bullet graze along his side. "You're lucky," he told Billy.

Billy responded, "I think we're all lucky." The men walked out on the side deck where the sun had begun to shine off the western side of the river. The gunboat's starboard side still smoldered above the water line, and her two stacks reached out of the water and pointed off toward the rising sun.

Catfish spoke as they looked across the river. "Wonder if anyone survived that explosion.

Jack particularly wondered if Bourdon had survived the massive explosion. If he was on the boat, it wasn't likely he or anyone else could have survived the total destruction of the gunboat. Jack turned his attention to the lost stack and the damage to the Mary E's bottom. "Billy, what're we gonna do about that missin' stack?" The men went topside to look at the damage. * ~ ~

By early afternoon, Billy had fashioned a short stack made from old lard cans that he figured should hold them until they got back to Wheeling. Jack eased the Mary E out into the channel and crossed the river toward the darkened wreck. The once-grand gunboat now

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sat quietly among the rocks that had ripped through her bottom. On the far bank of the river, Jack could see a crewman's jacket lying along the shore. That was the only sign of anyone getting off the gunboat. In the afternoon sun, he could see below the water surface and just made out part of the pilothouse. He could tell it'd been damaged by the explosion and fire. He wondered if Bourdon was really dead.

By now, several packet boats traveling north from Muskingum City had slowed to see what had happened. They offered help to Jack and his crew. Passengers in fine clothes stood pointing at the wreckage in the water. The last of the smoldering wreckage no longer burned. The Southern Sky was dead in the waters of the Ohio.

Jack and the crew of the Mary E moved slowly upriver. It was late now, and Jack could see the lights of the suspension bridge crossing the river. Several of the packet boats were tied to the wharf for the night. Smoke still drifted from their stacks into the night sky. Jack brought his boat into the sandy bar just north of Wheeling Creek, a safe place where he could repair his boat. He signaled down to Billy and Brother-in-law to make secure the boiler and tie the Mary E to shore. Jack looked back downriver and still wondered about Bourdon. Had he survived?

Jack stood looking south and then he looked toward the southern end of the island. His thoughts turned to Ell. Tomorrow he'd see the banker, settle with him, and get the reward money. He'd have

Billy find a repair crew for the boat. He also wanted to see Mudder and thank him for his help. Once that was all done, he'd find Ell and have that talk he'd thought about over the last few days.

Not long after they tied up, Brother-in-law and Joshua headed off to see Sarah and the big yellor dog. Two reporters showed up asking if Jack knew anything about the gunboat accident downriver. He told the reporters he guessed the inexperienced Captain of the boat got careless and steered his vessel into a dangerous place. His lack of experience on the river caused him to get into the submerged hazard known to local pilots as the Bastard Rocks. It was a terrible tragedy and loss of life. He'd tried to help the wrecked boat but the explosion was so great it had even damaged his boat that was in the main channel when the final explosion happened. Jack kept saying, "a terrible tragedy." Jack's story would be the one the world would know. Best anything beyond that stay with the sunken boat.

The remaining crew of the Mary E made their way to the River Front Hotel for the night. Jack booked three rooms, and the crew ate a fine meal in the main dining room. Jack later contacted D.B. Cecil and claimed his reward. He told Cecil after the money was in his possession, he would tell him of the machines' location. Cecil withheld five thousand dollars for the loss of the one machine. He also gave Jack a letter that he could give to the authorities, clearing his name in the matter of the sinking of the Boston. For the first time in several weeks, Jack and his crew went to bed as honest men.

Chapter 22

Rewards

Bright and early the next morning, Cecil came calling with the reward money in hand. He was accompanied by Henry Booth of the private investigation firm of Booth and Henderson in Pittsburgh. Cecil gave Jack the cash and had him sign that he had received it. "Jack, that is seventy thousand from me and I believe I deposited one hundred thousand from Bourdon in your account. A lot of money. Perhaps I can help you invest it."

Jack fanned a stack of money on his hand and replied. "This is gonna be divided among my crew, equally. They took as many risks as I did and should be equal in the reward."

The banker offered his hand to close the deal. The detective spoke, "Mr. Dulin, there is the matter of the location of the machines you recovered from the Boston." Jack told the men of the warehouse and the name on the crates. The men left to retrieve the lost nail machines. Jack heard later that the new machines revolutionized the nail industry.

Jack gave Billy a thousand dollars and told him to find Catfish and Jeremiah and take care of the repairs to the Mary E. Jack was going to south Wheeling to see Mudder and thank him for his help. Jack caught the trolley and paid the small fee. This time he was eager to see Mudder and tell him Bourdon was dead. The sun was

overhead and the part of town where Mudder hung out was bright with the high sun. When Jack entered the bar, only the bartender looked at him for a moment. The men at the bar seemed never to have moved since Jack's first visit. In the back of the smoky room, he could see Mudder in the same position as before. Jack didn't wait to be summoned; he headed straight for Mudder.

"So, Jack, you managed to beat Bourdon's gunboat. Not many know the whole story, but it will soon spread how your little steamer outwitted the confederate gunboat. Why, Jack you may yet be a hero."

Jack sat down beside Mudder, "I got lucky with their lack of knowledge of the river and my boat's ability to stay just ahead of them long enough. Mostly luck on my part and lack of it on Bourdon's. Cost him his life."

Then Mudder surprised Jack, "Did it? I mean are you sure he was killed? He was like me and you, Jack, remember? He managed to survive against the odds before. Did you find his body?"

Jack looked at Mudder, "Well no, but that gunboat blew with such force no one could've survived."

"One crewman did," Mudder said.

"I'm sure Bourdon was in the pilothouse when it hit the rocks. No one else would have pursued me in such a fashion as the pilot of that boat did. It had to be that Bourdon was in the pilothouse when it blew with the force of hell. He's dead. I'm sure of it." Jack said.

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“Well, I hope you’re right. Jack, I’ll drink to your health and then you’ll have to leave. I have business to attend to.”

The two men drank their drinks and then two men from the corner darkness came over to the table. “Mr. Dulin, we’ll take you back uptown.”

Mudder looked at Jack, “Don’t worry. I fed them this morning. They’re only offerin’ you a ride.” The big man smiled as Jack stood to leave.

Before Jack left he reached in his pocket and pulled a handful of gold coins out and laid them on the table beside Mudder. “You’re an information merchant. Good information is worth a fee. I’m sure Bourdon would want me to compensate you properly.”

Mudder picked up a coin and looked at it close. Then he placed it between his teeth and bit it. “Too hard; the gold content’s low. Them southern boys never could get things right.” Mudder and Jack laughed.

Outside, a wagon filled with kegs of beer sat waiting for Jack. The two men returned Jack downtown and dropped him off in front of the hotel. They made no conversation the whole trip.

Jack walked to the corner of the hotel and looked across the river toward the island. He knew there was one more stop to make before returning to see if repairs had begun on the Mary E. He was going to Tilley’s. He made his way to the bridge and stopped partway over to look down on the Mary E. He could see Billy had spared no expense in hiring help to repair the boat. He already had her pulled partway

up on shore and cribbing placed under her hull to make repairs easier. The burned roof boards were being removed, and a wagon loaded with new lumber sat near the front. He was thankful for his friend, Billy Meyers.

It wasn't long before Jack was in front of Tilley's place. Somehow, in the bright sunlight, it looked different to him as he opened the front gate. The sound of the squeaky gate announced Jack before he got to the bottom of the steps. Tilley greeted him standing at the top. She looked down at him as he smiled up at her. "Jack, she's not here."

The words stopped Jack in his steps. "Where is she? When did she leave?" Jack asked quickly.

"Don't know where she went. She stayed a day, asked for the money she knew I put away for each girl, said her goodbyes and left. Said she'd let me know where to send her things later. I ain't heard from her. Jack, she was crushed when you left her behind. She knew why you did it. But I don't think she was afraid, and I reckoned she wanted to go with you. She was hurt." Tilley's face showed she was sorry to have to tell Jack the news.

Jack stopped and sat down on the step half-way up. Tilley joined him. "I heard the gunboat blew up. I reckon you had somethin' to do with that." Jack indicated to her that he did. "Did you kill Bourdon?"

Jack stared straight forward, "Don't know for sure. He was on the boat when it exploded. Most likely no one on board when she

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went up could've survived. Mudder told me one crewman got off before the explosion and swam to shore. Truth is, I don't know anything for sure. But in my gut, Mr. Charles Bourdon is dead. That don't seem to matter much now. I've lost Ell and I never told her how I felt."

Tilley put her arm around Jack and pulled him close, "She knew Jack, but she didn't want to get in your way. She believed it was for the best that she went away. She knows you're a river man and most likely always will be, and maybe she thinks you don't want her in your life. Even though the past few weeks were different for you and her, you'll most likely go back to the way you were before. You and that sweet Billy, workin' the river."

Jack thought for a minute. "If I'd only told her how I felt."

Tilley leaned over to him, "Jack, if she contacts me I'll get ahold of you. I'm guessin' you'll be goin' back downriver when your boat's repaired?"

Jack nodded his head yes. Jack explained a little about the repairs to his boat and said after they were complete he'd return to Parlorton and wait for the next salvage job.

"Jack, I figured once you earned that reward money, you might try something else for a livin'?" Tilley asked.

"Tilley, it's really never been about the money. Me an' Billy, we love the river, always have. The money'll make it easier, but still I'm a salvager and that's all I'll ever be." Jack hugged the big lady and kissed her on the cheek as he stood.

“Careful, Jack, now that you’re a man of means, I just might charge you for them kisses.”

Jack smiled. “It would be worth every dollar.” He got up and headed back to the Mary E.

The front half of the Mary E was high and dry on the sandy shore. Six massive block and tackle pulleys had pulled the boat onto logs that she rolled up onto. Under her bottom, boards were missing and carpenters were fashioning replacements. Billy told Jack it would be a few days before the blacksmith shop could have a new stack and the parts to repair the top of the firebox. The roof section had been removed and new oak boards shone in the afternoon sun, waiting to be painted.

That evening, Jack rented the main dining room of the hotel for his crew and Sarah to have dinner. He invited Mudder, but he didn’t respond or show up. He sent an invite to Tilley and the girls but they couldn’t come; they were expecting customers. So in the end it was Jeremiah, Catfish, Joshua, Brother-in-law, Sarah, and Billy at the large table. A finer dinner none of them had ever before had.

After dinner, Jack gave all his crew members, except Joshua, each an envelope. “Joshua, I gave your share to Sarah. Arrangements for you to attend a fine military school here in ‘Wheelin’ have been made if you would like. A good education’ll give you the opportunity to do whatever you choose in the future. Sarah and Brother-in-law have agreed to adopt you as their own.”

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Joshua grinned real big, "Sunny too?" Sarah nodded her head yes.

Jack leaned over toward Sarah, "Across on the other side of the hill, I've bought a house with an iron picket fence around it. There's a rose garden on one side and a flower garden on the other side. Brother-in-law, there's a garden for you to grow vegetables in the back." Brother-in-law frowned at Jack's garden comment. Sarah grabbed Jack and hugged him.

Jack sat down and looked around the table at the others there. "I'll let you all decide how to spend your own money. I also want to tell you I've taken an equal share of the money and put aside for Ell. She was a big help, and I believe she deserves the money to give her a second chance. I've told Tilley to let her know whenever she contacts her. The gold coins we found in the box are also for you all to divide up. Not sure of their value because of the gold content, and they each carry the markings of the Confederacy. I'd recommend havin' them melted down and converted to federal money."

Those at the table smiled and agreed with Jack. "Catfish, Jeremiah, what're you two gonna do?"

Catfish stood up like he was gonna give a speech. "I'll be travelin' south with you to get my boat. Then I'll work my way back north catchin' turtles. Wouldn't seem right not to do what I love. Maybe, just maybe, when I get to Pittsburgh, I'll go right into one o' them fancy restaurants that buys my turtles, slap my money down and sit

down at one of their finest tables and have me a bowl of the turtle soup. Yes, sir, that's what I'm gonna do. Might even get my picture tookin' proper with one o' my turtles."

Jack looked over at Jeremiah, "What about you, frogman?"

Jeremiah looked around the table before answering. "Talked with a man from the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, an' he said they're gonna build dams clear down to the Mississippi and some on the Monongahela. They need a good geologist with an understandin' of how river currents affect the bottom structure. Said my divin' would be useful for takin' samples o' bottom rock structure. I reckon that would be me. With the reward money, I'll buy me a nice boat to live on and work my way down the river." Jeremiah shook Jack's hand. "Thank you, Jack, I'll remember this past week for the rest of my life."

Jack gathered his thoughts for a moment, "Billy and me have talked it over and we'll be returning to Parlorton to start Dulin & Meyers River Salvage. We're gonna be equal partners in the company. We heard the Big River and the Buckingham salvage boats are for sale. I might be wantin' to buy them now that we be havin' some money to start our own company. I guess we'll be takin' some o' those rich insurance companies' money ~~after~~ after all."

The group of friends laughed and talked long into the night. Near midnight, the party broke up and the small group of people went their separate ways.

"Jack, where're you goin'?" Billy asked.

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He paused for a moment and then said, "Gonna take a walk down by the river and check on the Mary E before goin' t' bed." Billy bid him good night and headed off to his room.

Jack walked along the river, quiet in the late night. He could, on occasion, hear the sound of a fish jumping somewhere in the dark. In a few days, the Mary E would be as good as new. Jack looked forward to getting back home to his simple life on the houseboat. He looked over the water toward the island and wondered about Ell.

Three days later, the Mary E was rolled back into the water. Her new stack had its own crown of polished brass. The bottom section had been repaired and sealed with a new coat of paint. Billy had thin metal plates installed along the bottom to protect it from hidden debris in the water. A fresh coat of paint gave her a brand new appearance. And on the side, in fancy letters painted by Brother-in-law, 'Dulin & Meyers Salvage.' Jack was proud of his boat and his friends, but he still felt the loss of a conversation unfinished. He stared at the empty river as he remembered Ell's face reflected in the door glass.

A few days later Catfish, Billy, and Jack started back down the river to Parlorton. The trip downriver was an easy pace with no time or place they had to be. The three men enjoyed each other's company and the cruise downriver. As they turned into the stretch of river they called The Shoot, all eyes were on the burned wreckage of the Southern Sky. She was cold now and had settled down further into the green water. Her port stack had pulled loose and was almost

sunk below the water's surface. Jack knew after a couple spring floods not much would be visible above water. As they passed, Jack looked to the shore where the crewman's jacket had been lying, but it was gone. Jack wondered about the boat and Bourdon as they passed their final resting place.

By evening they were back in Parlorton and the Mary E was once again tied off to the town's wharf. Catfish went in the cabin to look for his buckskins that Ell had cleaned and promised not to throw away. In the front cabin, on two hangers, was his old buckskin outfit. It didn't look good as new, but it was not far from it. Catfish folded it and laid it carefully across his arm as the three men headed down along the river to Jack's houseboat.

Come morning, Catfish had his vertical boiler fired up and ready to go. He stepped around to the front deck to where Billy and Jack were sitting drinking coffee. Catfish extended his hand to Billy, "You be one of the best engineers on the river. I'm hopin' your business venture works out well for you."

Billy clasped his hand with both of his, "I'll remember you as one of West Point's finest and a good friend."

Catfish then turned to Jack. "Captain, I was proud to be part of this crew. They'll tell up and down the river about the time the confederate gunboat returned to the Ohio River and the Mary E and her crew bested 'er. Most won't believe it, but you and I'll know the truth. Hope it shows them in the South, who believes they can still split this country, that it ain't likely to happen."

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Catfish pulled his hair back and fixed his ponytail. He stepped on board his small boat. He sounded the whistle and cast off the lines as he opened the engine's steam valves. The small boat began once again making that 'chug-chug' sound as it moved off upriver toward turtle country. He turned and waved to the two men now sitting alone on the front deck.

"Well, Jack, I believe this is where we started."

Jack smiled and drank his coffee. "This has to be the worst coffee in the world. You wanna go to town and get dinner and I can get some good coffee and a few supplies?" Jack asked.

Billy settled back in his chair, "Nah, you go ahead. I been needin' a good sleep for a couple o' weeks. Time I get about it." With that he sat back in his chair and pulled his hat down over his eyes.

Jack put on his jacket and captain's hat and headed up over the bank along the river into town. As he walked down Main Street he noticed a man painting a sign on the front glass of a store. Jack took interest because of Brother-in-law's hand at painting such signs. As he came up to the man, he looked at his steady hand as he gracefully finished the last letter.

The painter turned to him, "What do you think?"

Jack looked at the freshly painted sign. It read 'ELOISE'S DRESSES.' He looked through the window and standing just beyond the glass was Ell smiling at him. He looked at the sign painter, "Well, I guess today is the day I have that talk." Jack opened the door and entered the shop.

The sign painter was puzzled for a moment by Jack's comments—until he looked inside at the two kissing. He smiled as he said, "That certainly was a short talk."

The End

...or maybe that is a story for another day.



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Captain Jack Dulin and his friend Billy Meyers set out to salvage a wrecked steamboat. But two men from Jack's past change the course of the simple salvage job. This adventure on the Ohio River is set against the backdrop of river life in the late 1800's. Wheeling, West Virginia an industrial giant of the times plays a big part in the adventure that waits for Jack and his friends. Jack's past and a long ago battle of the Civil War is awaitng Jack as he goes for the salvage prize. Return of the Gunboat is set against river life and history that helped shape the growth of the state born out of the war.

Storyteller, Chuck Clegg intertwined his fictional characters with the history of the times. His life long fascination with history and life on the Ohio has great influence on the story and its characters.

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